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editorial

Plus ça change...

WORST NEWSPAPER

This issue, we bid a fond farewell to our long-running series of 'Strange and Sensational Stories from the *Illustrated Police News*', in which Jan Bondeson has trawled through hundreds of back issues of what was dubbed "the worst newspaper in England" in search of the stranger side of Victorian life. From dog-faced boys and rat-killing monkeys to ghastly murders and terrifying hauntings, we have enjoyed five years of Jan's gleanings from the golden age of the gutter press - although it should be said that perhaps not every tale printed in the *IPN* was wholly true or would meet the higher standards of our contemporary journalists... oh, hang on a minute...

BEST FAKE NEWS

Fake news is very much the topic *du jour*. Of course, we've been dealing with such stuff for decades here at Fortean Towers, and next month we'll be revisiting the subject. Meanwhile, we invite you to sit back and enjoy the finest example of the genre to come our way in some time, courtesy of a clever fake CNN site and dissemination via the the Internet. We so wanted to believe it...



Police Officer On LSD Attempts To Save Anti-Masturbation Dolphin Mascot From Imaginary Fire

Late at night on the last day of January, Police Officer Tom Downey of Phoenix, Arizona, broke into a local YMCA branch during a meeting for Christians who were "striving to live a masturbation-free lifestyle". His intention was to save the organisation's dolphin mascot from burning to death. When further police officers arrived, they found the 41-year-old officer naked, running around in circles and chasing the mascot. Downey said he had taken a mixture of LSD, cough medicine and antifreeze earlier that day. "He believed that the residence was on fire and he was rescuing the organisation's dolphin mascot," said Officer Rico Lee. "I instructed the mascot to stop, drop and roll which calmed Downey down enough for us to put handcuffs on him. In Downey's mind, once the dolphin was safe from this imaginary fire, then his job as a police officer was successful. If this had been a real fire, and Downey hadn't been on acid, we would probably give him an award of some kind for bravery. Unfortunately there was no fire and he was on acid."

Phil Freedom, 41, was a witness: "This man was just standing there, naked, staring through

the glass at our room where our meeting was going on with so much anger. He then broke through the glass and started running after the dolphin, taking off the mascot's head and shouting obscenities. It was absolutely horrifying."

The dolphin mascot was Paul Horner, 37, aka Fappy The Anti-Masturbation Dolphin, who belongs to a Christian organisation that travels around the country telling children about the alleged dangers and consequences of onanism. He described the evening's events: "This man broke through the glass window to our room and started running around yelling 'fire!'. That's when he set his sights on me, telling me that dolphins shouldn't be out of the water and that I was going

to catch on fire if I didn't immediately return to the ocean. I kept telling him that I wasn't actually a real dolphin but just a man dressed up in a dolphin costume. Besides being on drugs, [Downey] looked like a heathenish self-rapist [sic] too. I'll say a prayer for him, not a full-prayer though, just a half-prayer."

CNN asked Horner how he was holding up. "Beneath this dolphin costume there is more than flesh," he said. "Beneath this mask there is an idea, and ideas are bulletproof. Remember, remember the 5th of November - which happens to be my birthday. The gunpowder treason and plot. I know of no reason why the gunpowder treason should ever be forgot."

Downey has been charged with criminal trespassing, resisting arrest, assault, public intoxication and third degree criminal mischief. This is not his first run in with narcotics. In 2015, he was investigated for an undocumented kilo of pure cocaine that was found in his squad car; but due to a technicality, he was never charged. [AP, CNN] 1 Feb 2017.

David R Sutton
DAVID R SUTTON

Bob Rickard
BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING



Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

LISTEN

IT JUST MIGHT CHANGE YOUR LIFE



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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

The airman vanishes...

The hunt for the missing Corrie McKeague continues without success

Fortean Times has occasionally reported mysterious disappearances, some of which later turn out to have sinister explanations. For example, Lucy Partington vanished on 29 December 1973 while waiting at a bus stop in Cheltenham [FT6:3]. Twenty years later, we learned that the 21-year-old student, a cousin of Martin Amis, had been picked up by Fred and Rosemary West, murdered and buried under their brothel-cum-abattoir in Gloucester. And in 1996 we reported the disappearance of two teenagers, An Marchal and Eefje Lambrechts, after attending a hypnotism show in Blankenberge, Belgium [FT93:10]. They later turned out to be victims of the Belgian serial killer Marc Dutroux [FT95:14, 98:24].

At 3.24am on Saturday, 24 September 2016, a CCTV camera recorded airman Corrie McKeague, 23, walking into an alley in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. It was the last that anyone saw of him. McKeague, from Dunfermline, Fife, was posted to RAF Honington, Suffolk, in October 2013, and later became a gunner and team medic in No 2 Sqn, RAF Regiment. On the night he was last seen, he joined friends at the So Bar on Langton Place in Bury St Edmunds, about nine miles (14km) from their air base. They joined in a song with musician Nick Lowe, who said McKeague was "quite a regular" in all of the local bars. He is 5ft 10ins (1.78m) tall, of medium build, with short light brown hair, and that night was wearing a light-pink Ralph Lauren shirt, white jeans and a pair of brown suede Timberland boots. At 11.30 the group

MISSING

CORRIE MCKEAGUE

CAN YOU HELP?

Police are appealing for help in tracing a missing 23-year-old man.



Corrie McKeague was last seen in Brentgovel Street in Bury St Edmunds at around 3.20am on Saturday morning, 24 September, and has not been seen or been in contact with anyone since.

Corrie is described as white, 5ft 10ins tall, of medium build, with short light brown hair. He was wearing a light pink shirt and white jeans at the time he was last seen.



Officers are concerned for his welfare and are asking anyone who may have seen Corrie, or anyone who has any information on his whereabouts, to contact the incident room on 01473 782019.

SUFFOLK CONSTABULARY

www.suffolk.police.uk

ABOVE: Corrie McKeague has been missing since 24 September 2016.

headed to the Wetherspoon Corn Exchange pub, and later to the Flex nightclub on St Andrew's Street, a minute's walk away. Here, doorman Will Hook said McKeague had "consumed enough alcohol" to draw attention to himself and "amicably" agreed to leave at 1am.

He bought a kebab and chips from Pizza Mamma Mia, where he seemed "happy" and played rock, paper, scissors with a stranger. He took a nap for about two hours in a doorway of electrical store Hughes on the corner of Brentgovel Street and St John's Street, and at 3:08am forwarded a photo to a friend from his phone. He turned right into a loading bay area, known as

the "Horseshoe", behind Greggs, at 3:24am. The area is closed off by buildings and the rooftops have been searched and analysed by police. It has been proven that an individual cannot leave the area on foot without being seen on CCTV, but McKeague was not caught on camera again.

When he didn't turn up to parade on 26 September, RAF Honington reported his disappearance to police. The base would ordinarily report a serviceman

AWOL, but McKeague's disappearance was completely out of character. One suggestion was that he might have been in one of the bins at the "Horseshoe" area, which was then taken to a landfill site. On 4 October it was revealed that hours after he was last seen his Microsoft Lumia 435 mobile phone was tracked moving 12 miles (19km) away to Barton Mills, where there is a landfill site. Police searched a refuse lorry after finding its route matched the movements of the device, but the weight of the lorry's load was 15kg (33lb) – too light to have contained McKeague. As a result, the lorry was released and the landfill site not searched. The phone has still not been found.

Two weeks after McKeague's disappearance, his girlfriend

April Oliver, 21, discovered she was expecting his child, something the airman was not aware of. The pair had met via a dating website and had been together for about five months. Miss Oliver said she was on holiday in America when McKeague went missing, but returned to the UK as soon as she heard the news.

By the end of December, the hunt for the airman had taken more than 6,000 hours and cost over £26,000. Thousands of frames of CCTV footage had been trawled through. The Find Corrie Facebook page quickly gained more than 80,000 followers and there was a huge campaign on Twitter to locate him. On 6 January, a team of private investigators, paid for by online crowd funding, began inquiries on behalf of the family to complement the Suffolk Police investigation.

Later in January it emerged that in 2014 McKeague had joined the Fab Swingers website and had posted messages expressing a desire to meet both male and female couples aged between 18 and 60. His interests included adult parties, blindfolds, dogging, role-play, threesomes and voyeurism. His mother, Nicola Urquhart, later admitted that her son's girlfriend April also had an account on the website, and that they were both seeing other people. Whether this had any bearing on the airman's disappearance is anyone's guess. At the time of writing, police have started to excavate a 26ft (8m)-deep landfill site at Milton just north of Cambridge, which they say could take until the end of April. Since the last known location of McKeague's phone was 15 miles (24km) away in Barton Mills, the reason for this dig is unclear. www.suffolk.police.uk/news/missing-persons/corrie-mckeague; BBC News, 28 Dec 2016; BBC News, 9 Jan; D.Telegraph, 19 Jan; Sunday Mirror, 22 Jan; D.Mirror, 13 Feb 2017.



SOLITARY PURSUITS

The Snow Guardian and other hermits in the news

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SOME RIGHT COCK-UPS

Aphrodisiac vegetables and mustard suppositories

PAGE 13



WHAT'S IN STORE?

Asparamancer reveals all plus more Baba Vanga prophecies

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The Conspirasphere

Climate change conspiracy or just environmentally friendly recycling?
NOEL ROONEY surveys the latest not-so-new news swirling around the Conspirasphere...

It appears that President Trump (or his very interesting press secretary and tweet composer Sean Spicer) was wrong about the Chinese having created global warming so as to eviscerate the US car industry; of course, they were only advancing a theory of a kind. Now shocking new evidence has emerged to prove (there is a certain segment of the Conspirasphere that really loves that word) that the UN, in fact, invented the global warming hoax as a sure-fire way to defeat capitalism. The Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Christiana Figueres, made the shocking revelation at a press conference in Brussels: "This is the first time in the history of mankind that we are setting ourselves the task of intentionally, within a defined period of time to change [sic] the economic development model that has been reigning for at least 150 years, since the industrial revolution."

Shocking – or not actually that shocking, or that new. The excited flutter of discovery on a broad sweep of online sources turns out, on slightly closer inspection, to be a little short on fact-checking, and caught in a bit of a time warp. I tracked the story from Rense to a number of news sites ('news' here is used in its strictly post-truth context) before discovering that the hot headline was in fact from an article originally posted in 2015. The woman featured in the story as the Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Christiana Figueres, did hold that post in 2015, and did, apparently, make the statement quoted in the news stories, in February 2015, and in Brussels, at a news conference.

But two years have slipped by, and Spicer's Chinese car saboteurs have slipped in, and someone in the press office appears to have slipped out for a coffee and returned two years late. In the intervening time, Ms Figueres has been replaced (by Patricia Espinosa, a Mexican, and therefore either: safely on the other side of the Wall; or quite clearly another damn Communist) and the UN, despite the declared revolutionary goals, has failed to dent the bastion of capitalism. And it's been snowing in Dubai.

This species of recycling is all too common in the world of conspiracy theory; it acts as a reinforcement for views already solidified, and at the same time proposes a false novelty for memes lost and forgotten in the endless swirl of faux-shocking revelations that clutter that area of cyberspace reserved for Those Who Know What's Really Going On. But it's not unique to that world; the mainstream media, more often at the tabloid end, regularly promote old stories as if they are new. The latter do it because, increasingly, news outlets lack the staff and resources to fact-check properly, to the point where, arguably, 'the news' is a tenuous term in a theatre of events that does not require verity to engage us.

In the Conspirasphere, few news outlets have ever had either the resources, or the compulsion, to verify the material they broadcast. It is fractal grist for a partisan mill; and so many of the people who read and disseminate this stuff describe their Internet browsing as 'research' that the alt-media could be forgiven for assuming that all those researchers will happily do their own fact-checking. If conspiracy theory is migrating into the mainstream, it is fair to say that journalistic ideals of the tabloid variety are regularly making the return journey.

Some of the newer news on the alt-right wires is beginning to take on the appearance of a severely welt-ridden equine corpse. Pizzagate ought to have died with the Clinton presidential campaign – but, like the dish itself, this one is just too tasty to walk away from. Now comes a hot tip from an anonymous FBI insider that arrests are imminent; we're just waiting for Jeff Sessions, Mr Trump's not universally approved pick for Attorney General, to take office, and then the Satanic Democrats will get their just desserts. Unless the UN gets its insidious act together, and capitalism falls first. www.armstrongeconomics.com/world-news/climate/global-warming-is-about-destroying-capitalism/; www.unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/29623-figueres-first-time-the-world-economy-is-transformed-intentionally; <http://yournewswire.com/fbi-pizzagate-arrests-washington/>

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Found: sneezing monkey and walking fish

D.Telegraph, 5 Oct 2015.

Yes, your cat really is trying to kill you

Sun, 1 Nov 2015.

Unicorns could become an endangered species

Calgary Herald, 13 Nov 2015

Former London Zoo meerkat expert fined for glassing monkey-handler in row over llama-keeper

Independent, 15 Oct 2015.

Fox puts cat among pigeons at Tory conference

Bristol Post, 6 Oct 2015.

A London crow spoke bleakly from his perch by the bar

Irish Times, 25 Nov 2015.

SIDELINES...

TERRORIST MYSTICS

On 27 October, police in Georgia arrested Michael Mancil, 30, and James Dryden Jr., 22, confiscating a massive arsenal. Both men confessed that God had told them to blow up the aurora research facility (HAARP) owned by the University of Alaska Fairbanks "so souls could be released". Conspiracy theories of mind control have long swirled around the facility. *adn.com*, 2 Nov 2016.

PENGUIN PUZZLE

Officials at Calgary Zoo in Canada were perplexed when they found seven of the zoo's 22 Humboldt penguins drowned in the Penguin Plunge exhibit on 8 December. Something might have sparked a panic, preventing the birds from being able to surface for air; unfortunately, the holding area where the penguins were found was not monitored by cameras. *BBC News*, 9 Dec 2016.

CRASH LANDING

A man discovered in the Ajogodo River in Sapele, Delta State, Nigeria claimed to be a wizard flying from Benin airport to the UK. He said: "I was flying in with what is known in the physical realm as 'Plantain Leaf,' my expensive private jet in the coven realm. It crashed me into this bridge, when the fuel in it finished. My members will be here tonight to refuel it for me, so I can continue my journey to the UK." *naij.com*, 27 Oct 2016.

BEWARE SQUIRRELS!

Bad-ass rodents wreak havoc across the world

- On 7 December 2016, a squirrel climbed on an overhead line and fried, causing almost 1,100 customers in the Huntingdon area of Cambridgeshire to lose their electricity supply for nearly two hours. *BBC News*, 8 Dec 2016.

The pesky rodents have an impressive record for sabotage. In May 1980, they gnawed through circuit wires, setting off air-raid sirens in Toronto [FT34:26]. On 1 August 1994, a squirrel shut down the second largest stock market in the US for 34 minutes when it chewed through power lines near the Nasdaq computer centre at Trumbull, Connecticut [FT78:20]. In October 1994, a squirrel cut the power to Derby City Hospital and more than 1,100 houses when it climbed a power line and touched an 11,000-volt cable [FT84:14]. Squirrel saboteurs were very busy in 1996, blacking out the village of Hollingwood in Derbyshire in June, 1,290 houses in Stroud, Gloucestershire, in July, and 800 houses in West Lothian, Scotland, in September. All three rodents laid down their lives [FT96:14].

- The real threat to global critical infrastructure is not enemy states or organisations but squirrels, according to one security expert. Cris Thomas has been tracking power cuts caused by animals since 2013. Squirrels, birds, rats and snakes have been responsible for more than 1,700 power cuts affecting nearly five million people. Squirrels topped the list with 879 'attacks', followed by birds (434), snakes (83), raccoons (72), rats (36), martens (22), frogs (3). He concluded that the damage done by real cyber-attacks –

Stuxnet's destruction of Iranian uranium enrichment centrifuges and disruption to Ukrainian power plants being the most high profile – was tiny compared to the "cyber-threat" posed by animals. Most of the animal "attacks" were on power cables, but jellyfish shut down a Swedish nuclear power plant in 2013 by clogging the pipes that carry cool water to the turbines. Eight deaths have been attributed to animal attacks on infrastructure, including six caused by squirrels downing power lines that then struck people on the ground. Thomas only collected reports compiled in English and admitted that he was probably only capturing "a fraction" of animal-related power cuts worldwide. *BBC News*, 17 Jan 2017.

Six others emerged from a hedge and attacked him

- Delinquent grey fox squirrels attacked eight people in northwest Novato, Marin County, California, in late 2015. One leapt from a tree and onto a man's head as he did yard work on 13 November; five days later, one entered an Elementary School and attacked a student. On the day after Thanksgiving, Richard Williams, 78, was pottering around his garage when a squirrel scampered towards him. "He charged me and jumped, and from then on, the battle started," he said. The squirrel turned Williams's head, arm and legs bloody and smashed his glasses. "He was really vicious. He was clawing and scratching," he said. "Every time I'd get him off, he'd jump back up again." His 83-year-old wife Norma heard his screams and raced to his aid, swinging a broom. Still the attack continued. "And then he jumped her," Williams said. "I was able to grab him by the tail, threw him on the garage floor and he seemed stunned." The squirrel then raced off and a neighbour took the shocked couple to hospital. All the attacks were in the same

neighbourhood, suggesting the same crazed animal was to blame. *Marin (CA) Independent Journal*, 2 Dec; *CBS SF Bay Area*, 4 Dec 2015.

- A politician who declared war on squirrels was hospitalised on 13 November 2016 after one of the creatures darted between the spokes of his bike's front wheel. City of Chicago alderman Howard Brookins Jr lost several teeth and

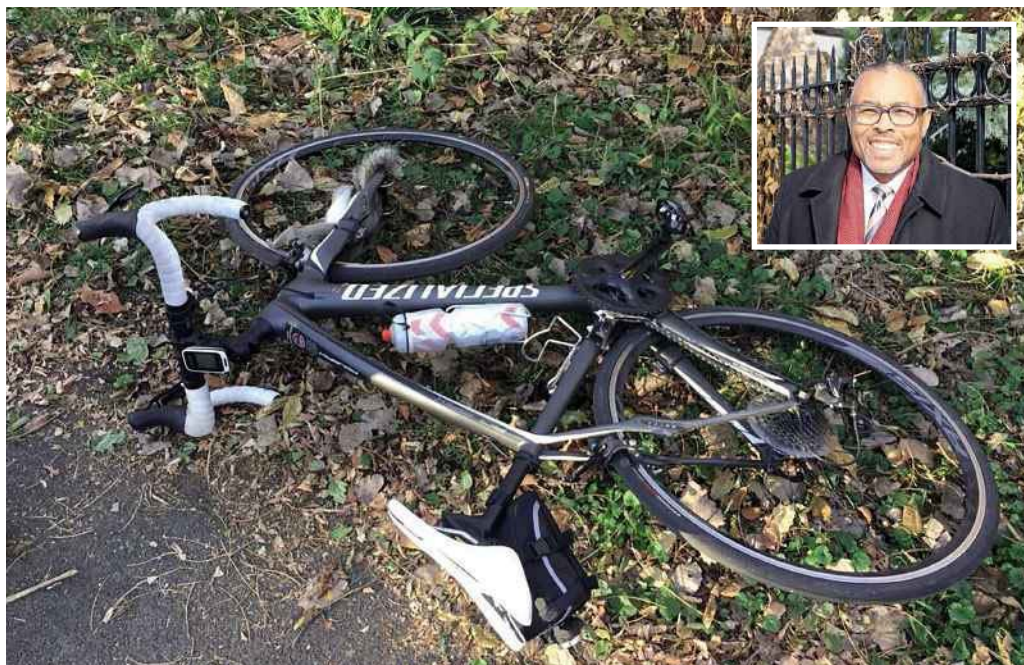


LEFT: Squirrels have been responsible for everything from common assault to sabotage and cybercrime.



MARTIN ROSS

PETER MACDARMID / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE: Alderman Howard Brookins Jr was thrown from his bike when a squirrel became caught in the spokes of his front wheel.

needed surgery for a broken nose and fractured skull after he went flying over the handlebars when the squirrel struck. He wanted to get the dead animal stuffed as a reminder of his ordeal, but police had thrown it away. The crash, which killed the animal outright and left it lodged in the wheel, happened a few weeks after he had called on the city to tackle the "aggressive" creatures. He told the *Chicago Tribune*: "I can think of no other reason for this squirrel's actions than that it was like a suicide bomber, getting revenge." On 21 October he had addressed a city council meeting alerting the authorities to the amount of money wasted by squirrels chewing their way through people's rubbish bins. *Washington Post*, 22 Nov; *Eve Standard*, 24 Nov 2016.

- A pack of fat squirrels is terrorising visitors to Tehidy County Park in Cornwall. Sophie Renouf, 23, and her three-year-old son Finley were set upon as the little boy reached out to feed one, and six others emerged from a hedge and attacked him. "He was screaming," said Ms Renouf. "There was blood pouring out of his hand." A friend told her the

brazen rodents had also tried to bite her little girl. Finley spent three hours in hospital having his wounds bandaged. *D.Mirror*, 12 Jan; *Sun*, 14 Jan 2017.

- Three squirrel breeders died from encephalitis between 2011 and 2013, after a virus was passed to them by the rodents. During an inquest, a new strain of the virus was found in the men's brain samples and in the variegated squirrel. This suggested it had spread from the rodents, which bit or scratched at least two of the three men in Germany. Variegated squirrels are an exotic breed from South America sometimes kept as house pets. *Sun*, 11 July 2015.

- In a paper published in *Science* last November, researchers announced that they had identified two strains of leprosy-causing bacteria – *Mycobacterium leprae* and *Mycobacterium lepromatosis* – in populations of red squirrels around the UK. It is only the third animal, after humans and armadillos, known to be susceptible to the disease. While not life-threatening, leprosy can lead to skin lesions, nerve damage in the extremities,

and blindness. *Mycobacterium leprae*, found in a group of red squirrels living on Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, Dorset, is closely related to the leprosy that affected Europeans during mediaeval times. Many cases of leprosy in the southern United States are zoonotic (transmitted by an animal, in this case an armadillo) in origin. However, leprosy is extremely hard to catch, close to 95 per cent of humans are naturally immune, and the disease is completely treatable with antibiotics. The last British case was in 1798, but there were 200,000 new cases worldwide in 2015. *popsci.com*, 10 Nov; *D.Mail*, *D.Telegraph*, 11 Nov 2016.

- Black squirrels – now allegedly poised to oust grey squirrels just as the latter have displaced reds – have been observed in the UK at least since 1993 [FT77:55]. In January 1997, Archway in London was being terrorised by a mutant strain of squirrel, thought to be grey squirrel-rat hybrids and nicknamed 'rattels' or 'squirrats' [FT97:8].

For more on squirrel delinquency, see FT335:9.

SIDELINES...

FRUITY BUST-UP

Sarah Orange, 22, overheard her boyfriend, Themba Banana, 29, whispering into his phone and accused him of talking to another woman. Banana then threw a plant pot that hit Orange. Banana, from Preston, pleaded guilty to assault and was sentenced to 100 hours unpaid work. *Sun*, 16 Nov 2016.

STRAIGHT TO HELL

Fearless passengers took Flight 666 to HEL on Friday the 13th of January 2017. Finnair Flight AY666 took off from Copenhagen heading for Helsinki, which has the airport baggage code of HEL. The aircraft was believed to be 13 years old. Hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia is the name for the phobia of the number 666, while the fear of Friday the 13th is called Paraskevidekatriaphobia, from the Greek *paraskevi* ('Friday'), and *dekatria* ('thirteen'). *mirror.co.uk*, *rt.com*, 13 Jan 2017.

OPERATIC LAST RITES

A powder sprinkled into the orchestra pit during the second intermission in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* at New York's Metropolitan Opera House on 15 October triggered a terror scare. Visitors feared an anthrax attack and Met officials had to cancel the rest of the opera. However, several audience members said a man had told them he was there to spread the ashes of a friend, his mentor in the opera. *D.Mail*, 31 Oct 2016.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

AIR FARMING

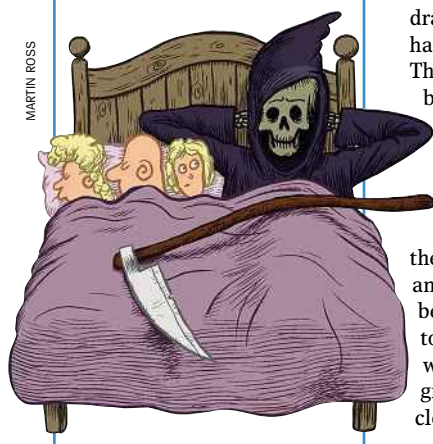
More than £500,000 worth of pure Australian air has been sold to Chinese and Indian customers in high-pollution cities. "Mobile air farming units" suck in air and fill pressurised canisters which sell for about A\$9.45 each by companies called Green & Clean and Breathe-OZ. (Queensland) *Courier Mail*, 16 Nov 2016.

GOLD IN PIANO

Shortly before Christmas, a "substantial" hoard of gold "artefacts" (mostly coins) was found hidden inside an old Broadwood upright piano, when its new owners in Shropshire had it retuned and repaired. It was thought the treasure was deliberately hidden more than a century ago. The piano was sold in 1906 to a music shop in Saffron Walden, Essex. In 1983 it was purchased by a family in the area, who later moved to Shropshire. *BBC News*, 12 Jan 2017.

REGO MEETS THE REAPER

In an interview last October, the painter Paula Rego, 81, recalled the night when, just as she was falling asleep, she heard footsteps "and the door opened and Death came in. So I rushed to my parents' room but Death came after me and got into bed with the three of us." Asked what Death looked like, she said: "It looked like it does: a skeleton with a scythe, draped in a hood." *telegraph.co.uk*, 2 Oct 2016.



MARTIN ROSS

Hadron fried marten

New museum exhibition explores unusual animal deaths



ROTTERDAM NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

ABOVE: This stone dead stone marten collided with the Large Hadron Collider. **BELOW:** The domino sabotaging sparrow.

The remains of a thoroughly cooked stone marten (*Martes foina*) are now on display at the Natural History Museum in Rotterdam, Netherlands, in an exhibition called "Dead Animal Tales". On 20 November last, the stone marten hopped over a fence at the £5.6 billion Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Switzerland, touched a transformer and was electrocuted by 18,000 volts. The LHC, which accelerates particles to near the speed of light to study the fiery origins of the Universe, lost power and shut down. "It's a fine example of what the exhibition is all about," said Kees Moeliker, the museum director. "It shows that animal and human life collide more and more, with dramatic results for both... Every hair of this creature was burned. The whiskers were burned to the bare minimum and especially the feet, the legs, they were cooked. They were darker, like roasted."

This wasn't the first time a marten has sabotaged the collider. In April 2016, an animal originally thought to be a weasel and later guessed to be a marten, which is in the weasel family, appeared to have gnawed through a power cable, closing the collider for a week. "The things we get are so

surprising," said Moeliker. "Just before the stone marten we had a fish that lodged itself in the throat of a man." The man had deliberately swallowed the catfish as part of a game with friends — they had reportedly worked up from goldfish to larger, more exotic species. However, he didn't know it was an armoured catfish. When it entered his throat, it raised spines to defend itself, which did not save its life but did put the 28-year-old man in hospital for a week.

The Rotterdam exhibition also displays the sparrow that was shot to death after knocking over 23,000 dominoes in the Netherlands in 2005, sabotaging

a world record attempt; a seagull that died after it flew into an ambulance; a mallard duck known in the scientific community for its documented history of homosexual necrophilia [FT178:12]; and a hedgehog that died after it put its head into a McDonald's McFlurry cup and couldn't escape. And then there's the smallest critter in the collection. A few years ago, Moeliker started collecting pubic lice after two British doctors alerted him that the animal might be endangered by habitat destruction associated with modern personal grooming habits. *Guardian*, 28 Jan; *npr.org*, 1 Feb 2017.



ROTTERDAM NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Omnipresent President

Trump found in mediæval minster and on the Red Planet

A GROTESQUE PRES?

A 14th century gargoyle (pictured at right) that's a dead ringer for Donald Trump has been spotted at Southwell Minster in Nottinghamshire. Strictly speaking it's a grotesque, not a gargoyle. A grotesque describes this type of carving in general, whereas a gargoyle specifically means something with a waterspout designed to take rainwater away from a roof. The grotesque was spotted and tweeted by the writer and broadcaster Samira Ahmed, before the Donald was elected. It is one of 280 at the Minster, and is located at the pulpitum, a screen that separates the nave from the choir. *Nottingham Post, D.Mail, 3 Feb 2017.*

TRUMP ON MARS!

A less convincing simulacrum appeared in a photograph of Mars taken by NASA's Opportunity rover in 2010, but was not identified with Donald Trump until August 2016. As the *Daily Mail* report said, "Some may just see a jagged rock cloaked in a black shadow", while "some believe [Trump] could be linked to or is a creature not of this world". Scott C Waring, described as a "well-known Martian researcher", wrote on his UFO Sightings Daily blog: "The face, nose and hair looked so much like Trump's that I had to share it with you."

Perhaps the President plans to check it out for himself. There has been speculation that he is entertaining the idea of a mission to the Red Planet; in a recent meeting with Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX and product architect for Tesla Inc., he reportedly discussed Mars exploration as well as public-private partnerships. *D.Mail, 1 Aug 2016; Daily Caller, 9 Feb 2017.*



SAMIRA AHMED / TWITTER



UFO SIGHTINGS

SIDELINES...

FELINE SAVIOUR

While walking in the mountains near Gimmelwald, Switzerland, a Hungarian hiker sprained his ankle, became disoriented and found his intended route blocked. Fortunately, he encountered a local black and white cat that guided him back to safety. "She kept looking at me to follow [and] led me straight to the path that would take me back down to the valley," he said. It transpired that the cat belonged to the owners of a nearby hostel. *independent.co.uk, 1 Sept 2016,*

YULETIDE WIT

Jacqueline Ross, 49, stole baby Jesus from a Nativity scene in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on 4 December and dropped the porcelain figurine off at a hospital with a note that read, in part: "Child has broken right foot which is been (sic) neglected. Parents Joseph and Mary Christ got a warning." Police didn't see the joke. Ross was identified from surveillance video and jailed for theft and institutional vandalism. *[AP] 16 Dec 2016.*

PALACE GHOSTS

Queen Silvia of Sweden, 73, says that Drottningholm Palace where she resides is haunted. "There are small friends... ghosts," she said. "They're all very friendly but you sometimes feel that you're not completely alone. It's really exciting, but you don't get scared." The palace was built in the 1600s on Lovon Island in Stockholm, and is the permanent residence of King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia. Princess Christina, the king's sister, backs the claims of haunting. *[AFP] 3 Jan 2016.*

JUST A JELLY

A concerned Australian man submitted a "bagged and tagged circular object" to police in Maroochydore, Queensland, in November, under the mistaken belief it was a breast implant and possible evidence of a drowning, or possibly a murder. The object turned out to a blubber jellyfish that had lost its tentacles. *BBC News, 30 Nov 2016.*



Solitary pursuits

A handful of hermits, from Austria to Australia

AUSTRALIAN TARZAN

Since 1955, the star athlete son of a former Georgian princess and a master at Sydney's Shore School roamed alone in the wilderness of northern Queensland, "testing" himself against some of the harshest terrain in the world. In his younger days he wore no more than a loincloth and was burnt almost black by the tropical sun. Michael Peter Fomenko saw himself as a modern-day Odysseus, and grew obsessed with building and sailing dugout canoes. In 1959, he survived a perilous 600km (373-mile) voyage in such a dugout from Cooktown to Merauke, in today's Indonesian province of Papua. He lived among remote Cape York Aborigines, killed wild boar and crocodiles with a machete, fought off sharks with his bare hands, covered himself with ash at night to ward off mosquitoes, and vanished like a ghost at any signs of officialdom. He was known as Tarzan, the King of the Coral Sea, or the Wild Man of Wujal-Wujal – and for many Australians he was a living frontier legend.

News of Fomenko first reached *FT* in 1981 [FT36:13]. From about 1990 until quite recently, he was living in bush hideouts south of Cairns. He emerged occasionally to jog to a nearby town for supplies, his trademark sugar bag over his shoulder, sparking waves of "Tarzan sightings" among his Internet followers. In 2012 all sightings ceased, and speculation grew that he must have died in the bush. Then, in September 2015, news came that he was living permanently at the Cooina Aged Care Centre in Gympie, three hours' drive north of Brisbane. He's been there since late 2012, when he became ill while 'walking' to Sydney to visit kinsfolk. At 85, Fomenko had taken his solitariness indoors. He doesn't speak to other residents in the home, and has refused all requests for interviews. (*Queensland Courier-Mail*, 24 Aug 2009; (*Sydney Sun-Herald*, 3 April 2011; (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24-25 Nov 2015; 'Bizarrrism' (199) by Chris Mikul, pp.86-87. See also FT181:12.

THE SNOW GUARDIAN

For the past 40 years, billy barr, 65 – he insists his name be written with lower case letters – has been living alone in Gothic, Colorado, a ghost town deserted since the 1920s, passing the time by recording all sorts of data, anything he can measure. He never imagined his hobby would help scientists better understand climate change and earn him a cool superhero name – The Snow



ABOVE: Michael Peter Fomenko in full Tarzan mode. FACING PAGE: Gottfried Scholeneuer, the bell ringing hermit of Saalfelden, photographed in 1955.

Guardian. barr first came to Gothic in 1972 as an environmental science student doing water chemistry research. He liked the quiet life so much that he never left. He began the winter of 1974 camping in a tent, not ideal in a place where snow reaches 25ft (7.6m) a year. Luckily, the owner of an abandoned mining shack let him move in, and it became his home for the next eight years, and the place where he started his impressive database on snow. The only motivation for his epic journal was to fight boredom.

When the shack burnt down, he found another place to stay. He only uses measuring devices of his own invention: a marked pole to measure the depth of snow, a snowboard to measure daily snowfall, a hanging butcher's scale to determine the snow's density. He notes the first arrival of animals in the spring, and when the ground first reappears after a snowmelt. In a separate journal, he has kept detailed notes about the avalanches he observed in the valley, a record which many consider to be the most comprehensive data on natural avalanches in the world.

barr goes weeks at a time without seeing another human being, and the only way to reach the closest town is by skis. He travels the four miles to Crested Butte about twice a month to restock supplies, but he's not a big fan of social interaction. Put together, his mountains of data paint a clear picture of the radical transformation of Colorado's high alpine landscape in the last 40 years.

"The trend I see is that we're getting permanent snow pack later, and we get to bare ground sooner," he said. His claims have been labelled as biased by climate change deniers, but he wasn't out to prove anything when he first started meticulously recording data. No one can accuse him of having a hidden agenda because he started his project long before people began talking about global warming. Recently, barr was the subject of a short film called *The Snow Guardian* (www.daysedge.com/film/2016/11/the-snow-guardian) and appears in the documentary *The End of Snow* (www.endofsnow.com/). *odittycentral.com*, 9 Jan 2016.

HERMIT WANTED

There are no neighbours and the views are stunning, and if you can live without heating, running water, electricity and Internet then why not apply for a job as a hermit? Such is the position that Saalfelden near Salzburg in Austria is seeking to fill, inhabiting alone one of central Europe's last hermitages, built into a cliff above the town. "Since its creation 350 years ago, the Saalfelden hermitage was inhabited every year," said priest Alois Moser. "But we don't have a successor to the last hermit." According to the job description, the successful candidate should have a "connection to Christian belief" and be "at peace with themselves" at 1,400m (4,600ft) above sea level.

Applicants should not expect complete seclusion, however. The hermitage gets a steady stream of visitors coming to "enjoy the view, to pray and to talk," the advert on Saalfelden's website cautions. "The applicants need to know that the Saalfelden hermit does not lead a lonely life. Many people come and want to confide in someone. He has to be there for them," said Moser. The previous hermit, former priest and psychotherapist Thomas Fieglmüller, returned to Vienna after just one season – the hermitage is only open from April to November – to write. "Life in the hermit's cell is spartan, but the nature is very beautiful. I met lots of nice people and had good conversations," he said. "But there was also criticism from apparently arch-conservative Catholics because I didn't have a cowl or a beard... Maybe I was the wrong person." Before him, a Benedictine monk lived there for more than a decade. In 1970 a man fired a shotgun at the doors of the hermitage, sending the hermit fleeing. The motive turned out to be jealousy – the gunman had applied for the job himself. One thing to bear in mind for those applying to fill the vacancy – by post only; no emails – in time for the 15 March deadline: the job is unpaid. [AFP] *D.Telegraph*, 15 Jan 2017.





ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING digs up some amazing discoveries from the age of the dinosaurs, as well as Britain's earliest example of town planning and an Anglo-Saxon Christian cemetery, complete with tree trunk coffins.



ABOVE: The feathered dinosaur tail trapped, along with some insects, in 99-million-year-old amber. **BELOW:** The pebble found on a Sussex beach and now identified as the first fossilised dinosaur brain ever found.

DINOSAUR TAIL TRAPPED IN AMBER

The fluffy tail of a dinosaur has been found entombed in 99-million-year-old amber. Chinese palaeontologist Lida Xing spotted the 6.5g specimen, the size of a dried apricot, at an amber market in Myitkyina, Kachin state, north-eastern Myanmar (Burma), near the Chinese border. The amber had already been polished for jewellery and the seller had thought the trapped specimen was plant material. On closer inspection, however, it turned out to be the tail of a feathered dinosaur about the size of a sparrow. Lida Xing was able to establish where it had come from by tracking down the amber miner who had originally dug out the specimen. It adds to fossil evidence that many dinosaurs sported feathers rather than scales. The findings are published in the December issue of *Current Biology*. Fragments of dinosaur-era bird wings have been found preserved in amber before, but this is the first time part of a mummified dinosaur skeleton has been discovered. Microscopic examination and CT (computed tomography) X-ray scans confirmed that the tail had come from a flightless dinosaur and not an early species of bird. It belongs to a young coelurosaurian – a theropod, the large family of mostly carnivorous two-legged beasts to which *Tyrannosaurus rex* belonged. The feathers suggest it was chestnut brown and white. Chemical analysis

showed that the soft tissue layer around the bones retained traces of ferrous iron – residue from the animal's blood. *BBC News*, 8 Dec; *[PA,CNN] newscientist.com*, 9 Dec 2016.

DINOSAUR BRAIN FOSSIL

A brown pebble 4in (10cm) long, picked up by fossil hunter Jamie Hiscocks on a beach near Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, in 2004, has now been identified as the first fossilised dinosaur brain ever found. It is thought to have come from the plant-eating Iguanodon, which grew to 30ft (9m) and weighed four to five tons. It died in a swamp during the early Cretaceous period, about 133 million years ago, and its brain was 'pickled' (or mineralised) in mud at the bottom. The fossil retained distinctive features such as the meninges (a protective membrane surrounding the brain), blood

vessels, collagen, and structures thought to represent the outer layer of nerve cells, or cortex. Typically in reptiles, the brain takes up about half the space in the skull because it is surrounded by a dense mass of blood vessels and vascular chambers; but the brain tissue appears to have been pressed directly against the skull, suggesting that some dinosaurs had larger brains than previously thought. If it was as tightly packed into the skull as it appears, this creature could have had a brain three times larger than expected; there again, the brain might have just collapsed against the skull as it decayed after death. *National Geographic online*, 27 Oct; *D.Mail*, 28 Oct 2016.

PAX BRITANNICA

What might be Britain's oldest planned town has been discovered near Winterbourne Kingston in Dorset. Dubbed 'Duropolis' after the local tribe, the Durotriges, the 20-acre (8-ha) settlement dates to around 100 BC, 70 years earlier than Silchester in Hampshire, which in 2011 was identified as Britain's first pre-Roman planned town. Duropolis was an open settlement, one of the largest ever found in Britain, with no protective ditches or walls, set in fertile farmland. A geophysical survey has revealed at least 200 roundhouses. The discovery contradicts the prevailing idea that most Iron Age Britons lived in hill forts because of endemic inter-tribal warfare. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mirror*, 17 July 2015.

TREE TRUNK COFFINS

Coffins made of hollowed-out tree trunks have been found at a previously unknown Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Great Ryburgh in Norfolk, thought to belong to a community of early Christians, suggested by the east-west alignment of the graves, with the heads pointing west. It is the first time such "exceptionally" well-preserved wooden coffins dating from the seventh to ninth centuries AD have been found in England. Anglo-Saxon coffins rarely survive because the wood rots, and previous evidence has largely consisted of staining in the ground from decayed wood, as was the case with the Sutton Hoo ship [FT350:12]; but waterlogged conditions in the Wensum river valley, combined with acidic sand and alkaline water, made perfect conditions for preservation. Some 81 dug-out coffins were discovered, made from oak trees split lengthways, with the body placed in one half and the other used as a lid. There were also six that were plank-lined, thought to be the remains of a more sophisticated type of burial involving box-like coffins with straight sides. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 16 Nov 2016.

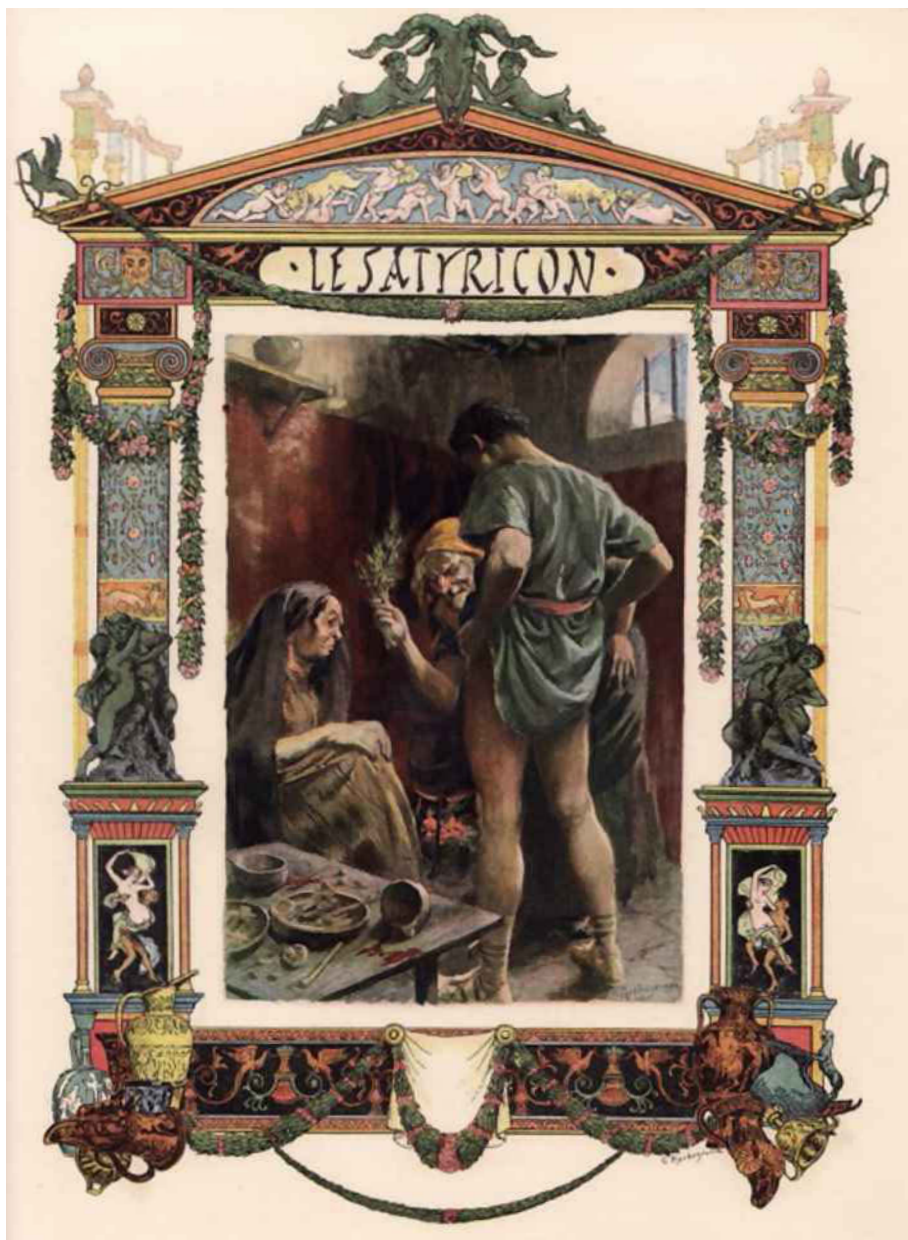


CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

209: SOME RIGHT COCK-UPS



is a relative of carrots and parsnips. All ranked high on the ancient Get It Up list; cf. for Tiberius's erective efforts R Syme's delightful 'Diet on Capri,' *Athenæum* 77 (1989), 261-71, also AC Andrews on carrots and parsnips, *Classical Philology* 44 (1949), 182-96; 55 (1958), 145-52 – all online.

Caligula is supposed to have fed his senators an exclusively carrot dinner so that he could watch them "rutting like rabbits". Some years ago, on *Coronation Street*, Mavis surreptitiously fed Derek parsnips to re-kindle his interest in her – for most men it'd take a lot more than that. An alternative might be to imitate Curly in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Capricorn*, who inflamed a girl by shoving a carrot up her twat. Galen, followed by Thomas Aquinas, promoted foods that cause farting – It's an ill wind....

Not every ancient believed in these priapic panaceas. Ovid (*Art of Love*, bk 2 vv415-24) scathingly dismisses a traditional venerable list of herbs and vegetables as "hocus-pocus". Nettles, pepper, and other urticants are also Ovidian no-nos. He'd have shivered in agreement with Oribasius's warning (*Medical Collections*, b8 ch39) to avoid mustard suppositories that burn your bum – *anus horribilis*, as Queen E2 almost lamented.

Petronius's (*Satyricon*, ch138) impotent hero Encolpius, after vainly trying all the usual herbs and spices – more than go into Colonel Sanders's Kentucky Fried Chicken – is finally cured by an old crone flogging his genitals with nettles (worse than Bond's ordeal by carpet-beater in *Casino Royale*) and bugging him with a peppered dildo. This apparently successful (text becomes fragmentary) procedure (colloquially known as 'pegging') may have inspired the climactic scene – with reverse effect – in Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge*.

As Al Jolson said in *The Jazz Singer*, "You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet." The Greek medico-magic text *Cyanides* (bk1 ch18) recommends wearing an amulet containing a sliver of ostrich gizzard. A Byzantine manual (*Farm Work*, bk19 ch5) swears by a paste compounded from the ashes of a deer's tail mixed with wine – O Deer! Envy the Indians (Theophrastus, *On Plants*, bk19 ch18) who had an amatory plant – not specified, dammit! – which could inspire you to 70 erections per night, quite eclipsing Cialis and Viagra.

Greeks and Romans – poor sods – never had the pleasure of chocolate. As a chocoholic, I'm pinning my hopes on the claim that the dark variety is good for you. In the 18th century, Casanova and the Marquis de Sade believed in its aphrodisiac powers. At erotic extremes, Madame de Pompadour imbibed it to relax her frigidity, Madame du Barry – a regular nympho – plied her gallants with it to help them keep (it) up with her.

Last but definitely not least comes (in both senses) Aztec Chief Montezuma who along with consuming 100 dishes per dinner would drink 50 cups of chocolate before going off to his Milk Tray selection of 100 wives and 4,000 concubines.

I should cocoa!

"I wonder what happens with Love Potion Number Ten?" – The Clovers

(Referential frugality: except where otherwise specified, basic sources are Pliny's *Natural History* plus Hellenic herbalist Dioscorides and the two great Greek versions of Doc Martin, Hippocrates and Galen. Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History*, Univ. Chicago, 2007, pp1-24, provides a rich repertoire of remedies. And, don't forget that one-time classic, Norman Douglas's *Venus in the Kitchen*, 1952).

Greeks and Romans were firm believers in

the natural aphrodisiac properties of herbs, plants, and vegetables – at least they weren't flogging rhinoceros horn to Oriental hopefuls. Carrots, garlic (worshipped by the Egyptians as a goddess), leeks, lentils, parsnips, rocket – you name it, somebody recommended it.

Emperor Tiberius (AD 14-37), when (as an early devotee of wank-magazines) not resorting to porno – his bedroom contained the sex manuals of Elephantis and Parrhasius's picture of Atalanta fellating Meleager – pinned his hopes on skirret, imported annually in bulk from Germany. Skirret (*Siser* in Latin)

MAKING CONNECTIONS

DAVID HAMBLING looks at recent developments in what may turn out to be the ultimate long haul in science – understanding the complex workings of the human brain.

The human brain is often called the most complex object known to science, with around 100 billion neurons, each connected with up to up to 7,000 others. If we understood how those connections worked, we would know how to repair a brain, how to replicate it, perhaps even how to improve it. But do we have the right tool for the job?

In earlier times, researchers could only poke and prod at the brain, an activity that culminated in some dubious psychosurgery. Later they tickled the brain with electric currents and guessed by the patient's response what each brain area did. Since 1991 researchers – the well-funded ones – have had functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). This non-intrusive 3D technique sees inside the brain and, by detecting oxygenated blood flow, indicates which parts are working at any given instant.

Researchers can see what happens in the brain when a mathematician struggles with an equation, an arachnophobe sees a spider, or an artist visualises a scene. There are technical complexities, but in essence fMRI shows brain area activation.

fMRI is a remarkable advance. Victorian phrenologists could only guess which 'organ' of the brain was responsible for which mental function. They were almost entirely wrong, apart from the 'faculty for words', which was located close to Wernicke's area, now known to control speech (somewhere behind your left ear). Now the brain is divided into over 300 areas, each with a distinct, though not necessarily well-understood, function.

How the brain is affected by conditions from Alzheimer's to autism, and how drug treatments work, has become clearer thanks to fMRI. No documentary about the brain is complete without the colourful computer-generated fMRI graphics. The simplifications and exaggerations of popular science faced with gee-whizz technology led to the powers of



ABOVE: A functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) scan shows the effect on the brain of listening to music. **BELOW:** A 19th century plaster phrenological bust.

fMRI being overstated, followed by an inevitable media backlash.

Craig Bennett of the University of California won an Ig Nobel Prize in 2012 for an fMRI study on a dead salmon [FT295:20]. As usual, the imaging process involved a large number of image cells or voxels. With the correct processing, background noise and spurious signals were cancelled out, showing no activity. However, by selectively using uncorrected data, Bennett 'demonstrated' brain activation in certain areas.

"The more chances you have to find a result, the more likely you are to find one, even by chance," says Bennett. "We have accepted statistical methods to correct for this, but not all scientists use these methods in their neuroimaging analysis."

Weeding out false positives remains a chronic issue in fMRI studies. In 2016 the *New York Times* suggested that 15 years of fMRI work was invalidated by a flaw in analysis.

Anders Eklund and Thomas Nichols of Linköping University in Sweden had published a study showing the correction process for false positives did not work in all circumstances. Some of the 40,000 studies

published using fMRI data undoubtedly reported phantom activations as bogus as the signal from the dead salmon. However, according to Nichols, the number of studies affected was less than 4,000, and only a fraction of these were actually wrong. More importantly, the methods used to analyse fMRI have been corrected.

Seeing which brain areas are activated only takes us so far. We also need to understand how connections between brain areas work. Ultimately, the brain is nothing but connections. Neural networking software, which mimics how a brain processes information by changing the strength of connections, is increasingly used for tasks from spotting cancer on X-rays to controlling robot fruit-pickers. To build a neural network model that matches the brain we need to have its 'connectome', the connection equivalent of the

human genome. This requires a process known as network analysis.

We already know that brain areas with many interconnections are important in large-scale brain functions.

A group of 12 brain areas known as the "rich club" is a hub of brain activity. These

well-connected areas handle information processed in other brain areas. Some researchers believe the "rich club" is where human consciousness resides.

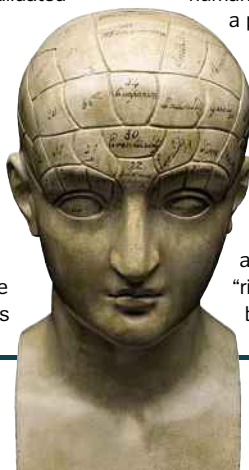
Again, the methodology is challenged, this time by a recent paper, called "Could a Neuroscientist Understand a Microprocessor?" in the journal *PLOS One*. Two researchers applied the network analysis techniques used by neurobiologists to a simple computer chip, the 6502. (Older readers will recognise this as the processor in the venerable BBC Micro.) The 6502 is infinitely simpler than the human brain, but the traffic analysis still failed to establish accurately the hierarchy of information processing.

In particular, while the analysis located some of the key structures present in the chip, but gave little idea of how they were working or how they related to each other. It also turned up spurious connections that were coincidental or trivial. For example, some transistors appeared to be activated only while playing "Donkey Kong"; they were not related specifically to the game as neuroscientists might assume, but only to some lower-level functions. The "Rich club" may be equally misleading.

In a sense, this is not a surprise. Researchers have had the complete connectome of a worm called *Cænorhabditis elegans* since 1986, which has just 302 neurons. Even with this, they are still unravelling how the worm responds to temperature, pressure and light and how it coordinates movement.

Understanding the human brain is perhaps the ultimate long haul in science. Sequencing the three billion base pairs of the human genome took 20 years; understanding and applying that knowledge to treat inherited conditions will take much longer. Recording and deciphering the connectome will make the genome look like child's play.

The path of scientific progress is likely to be erratic as usual. In a couple of decades fMRI has provided more insights than all the previous centuries. More and better tools are needed. However, there will always be critics keen to seize on failures of neuroscience. After all, who wants to believe their mind can be reduced to a set of numbers?



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GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE welcomes the return of old-fashioned techniques to modern ghost hunting.

TURNING THE TABLES

With 2017 underway, many opportunities exist for ghost hunting, but in recent columns I have looked askance at the addition of many modern ghost hunters for deploying gadgets of no proven value on nocturnal investigations into haunted premises.

It therefore comes as a refreshing change to find a ghost hunting group resorting to some old-fashioned, spiritualist-style table turning that requires just open-minded participants and one piece of household furniture. This was the commendably experimental approach taken by the group Paranormal Friends at their vigil held in the antique Guildhall at Much Wenlock, Shropshire, on 21 January 2017. According to comments by organiser Christopher Morris to the *Shropshire Star* of 24 January, the results of this experiment were “mind-blowing”.

Paranormal Friends use a variety of techniques, arriving at the 16th century building with a collection of equipment, and also allowed members of the public to participate for a fee. But after hearing what they describe as “banging sounds”, they decided to revert back to the traditional approach of table turning to try and contact the ghosts believed to haunt the former courthouse and council chamber.

Table turning requires no skill and removes at a stroke the tricky business of monitoring readings and output from complex equipment. The most popular method is for a group of people (traditionally not 13 in number) to sit around a polished table with their hands lying flat, face down on the surface. The sitters’ fingers touch those of their neighbours, and each person’s thumbs also touch each other, to create a circle. Alternatively, sitters may present their hands palms upmost, for some believe that this position will both generate and receive power. Often it is felt that the lights in the room should be dimmed.

The method of establishing communication, if no known medium is



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES

present, is to wait a few minutes in silence and hope that something will happen – the table move or rocks, or raps may be heard. It is recommended that all participants try and think of nothing, keeping their minds blank. This may be difficult, and one recommended method is to “think of a blank cinema screen or a white sheet” (Andrew Green in *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide*, 1973, 2016). If the group is fortunate, it will be rewarded by dramatic movements of the table and raps and creaks emanating from it. To participants witnessing these strange movements and gyrations, it often appears the table is moving with a force exceeding what the sitters can physically contribute with their hands, either individually or collectively.

The physical reactions observed with the table may seem to be in response to questions put by the sitters, whether verbally or simply formed in their minds, giving the impression that a communicating entity is responsible. There can be no doubt that tables do move in such circumstances,

ABOVE: Much Wenlock's 16th century Guildhall, scene of a vigil in January this year that yielded “mind-blowing” results.

although the question of what exactly is causing the motion and acoustic effects is contested.

On their night at the Guildhall, Paranormal Friends were swiftly rewarded by movements from their table. “We were dumbfounded – it’s something we had never seen before,” said Mr Morris, who described how they believe they made contact with the spirit of a young girl who “wanted to play a game”. A ball was duly concealed within the building, whereupon the table tipped in the direction it was hidden. “The table was literally running around the room to find the ball”. Table movements succeeded in locating the ball four times, even though “the guests didn’t know where the ball was hidden, only one of the team leaders.” Several names were also obtained through séance questioning, including one supposedly from a deceased



ABOVE: Images from a YouTube video by the Paranormal Friends group show them using traditional table turning techniques in their investigations.

local councillor who gave an age at death that the group plans to follow up with historical research.

I welcome this excursion by a ghost hunting group into table turning, not least as an active acknowledgement that if you really believe you are trying to contact spirits, then you may as well adopt a long-practised method from years gone by rather than use electronic devices which patently do not register ghosts.

Whether one thinks that spirits are responsible or the unconscious mind of the sitters acting collectively, there is certainly an enormous and challenging set of observations recording table turning effects to be found in the archives of psychical research organisations, spiritualist bodies, private diaries and obscure pamphlets. Over the generations much anecdotal evidence suggests that more than human muscular forces are at work, particularly when levitations of tables occur in good light and the absence of human contact.

Although claims have been made that table turning was first practised by mediæval Jews, the technique really came into its own with the beginnings of spiritualism at the home of the Fox sisters at Hydesville, New York State, in 1848. Initially rapping noises and object movements seemed like a poltergeist disturbance, but these sounds proved responsive to questioning and were contagious, following the sisters from the house and into the homes of relatives and neighbours. Soon the Fox sisters were giving public performances and spiritualism was born with the realisation that people could duplicate many of their effects by invoking the spirits for themselves at home. Initially confined to raps, the repertoire of manifestations rapidly expanded and tables were used to facilitate the sounds, often with a tilted table leg being used for rapping out letters of the alphabet and numbers.

Partly because this was such a laborious method of obtaining messages, participants began engaging in a voluntary form of spirit possession by consent, typically inviting the visiting spirits to take over their bodies and minds in order to speak or write through them. However, one didn't need a medium to try table turning and because spiritualism never carried a 'don't try this at home' warning it became wildly popular and spread internationally. Many disbelievers who witnessed the phenomenon became converts to spiritualism. Others who confronted it were appalled, seeing such experiments as an attack on reason or a threat to established religion.

Many mocked from a distance without trying it, such as Baron Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), who admitted having "a holy horror of pinewood spirits" and referring to the "insane infatuation which



LEFT: The Fox sisters (seated), whose Hydesville, New York, home became the birthplace of the 19th century spiritualist movement.

to be possible to design a more sophisticated type of table to test and record physical contacts in such experiments.

Many others confronted by personal evidence of movement accepted the phenomenon as genuine, including Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), co-founder with Darwin of the theory of natural selection. On 22 July 1855 Wallace conducted experiments in table turning with his wife and friends in the privacy of his home and was rewarded with movements and raps he could not explain. Wallace became a convinced spiritualist, as ardent as Arthur Conan Doyle at a later date.

An example of how both intellectual and banal communications could emerge within one tightly organised domestic circle was illustrated by novelist Victor Hugo, who with his family began experimenting with table séances as an after dinner recreation following exile to Jersey in 1858. Hugo believed he had contacted spirits of the dead and

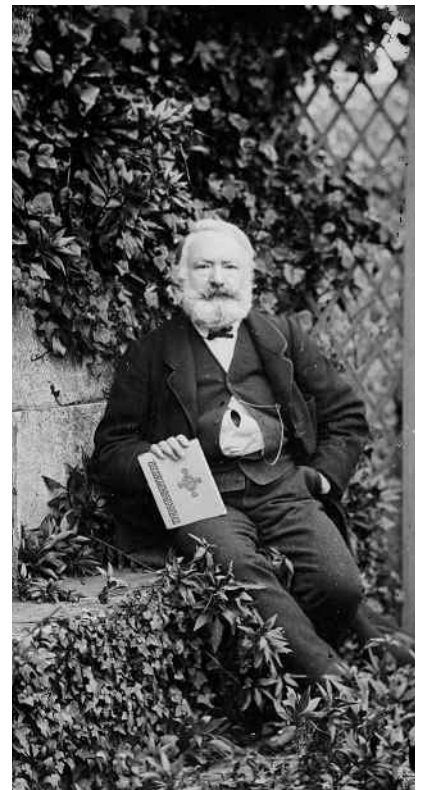
SPIRITUALISM AND TABLE TURNING BECAME WILDLY POPULAR

has seized the fashionable world of London for animating bits of wood by spiritualism and making oracles of table legs". (*In Life of Alexander Von Humboldt: Compiled in Commemoration of the Centenary of his Birth* (1873) by Julius Löwenberg, Robert Avé-Lallemant and Alfred Dove). Another famed opponent was Michael Faraday (1791-1867), the discoverer of electromagnetic induction. He was repelled by spiritualist manifestations and sought to explain table movements as unconscious muscular action by the sitters. Of course, Faraday was no biologist (he even disliked the term physicist) but his conjectures have been oft cited and uncritically accepted by sceptics in the century and half since. However, Faraday's prejudice against spiritualism may have been motivated by his own religious faith and membership of the strict Sandemanian sect, an offshoot of Scottish Presbyterianism. But the ease with which table turning could be organised meant it easily survived Faraday's denunciation. In the 21st century it ought

also intellectual abstractions such as "the Spirit of Criticism". Séance communications reflected his complex personality and his literary output at the time; few in the audience of the world's longest-running stage musical *Les Misérables* know its title was purportedly revealed to Hugo by a discarnate spirit. However, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was the great author's own unconscious being tapped; but events going on at his home made them believe an objective psychic presence was at work.

Hugo experimented out of curiosity and a desire to fill in time, but in many other cases the driving force was personal bereavement. Even the most intellectual and ordered of minds might attempt table séances when afflicted by grief. An example was Brogdan Hasdeu, a Romanian polymath who authored the first national dictionary in the language. His involvement in spiritualism followed the death of his gifted daughter Julia, who had died tragically at the age of 18, less than two months into her studies at Sorbonne University in Paris. Hasdeu began a lengthy series of spiritualist experiments and investigations, eventually setting up a temple or 'castle' built with guidance from the spirits. The tables he used are still preserved – along with a chair specially designed for spirit beings (deemed to need a sit-down after their long journeys from the other side!).

In Britain, the Pre-Raphaelite artists William and Evelyn de Morgan, who spent many years pursuing spiritualism after employing



LONDON STEREOSCOPIC COMPANY / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Table turning in a fashionable French salon in the 1850s. ABOVE RIGHT: Victor Hugo experimented with the technique during his time in the Channel Islands.

a servant girl in 1854, known as 'Jane'. She acted as a medium, with table movements and rappings surrounding her. 'Jane' was generally successful when in the company of her mistress, but her powers proved unpredictable and with most persons she failed altogether. After two years her abilities disappeared completely, but the de Morgans spent many more years in their own personal spirit research. 'Jane' remained a serving girl throughout, a counter to views that such phenomena were manufactured by conniving women wanting to advance themselves.

Not all experiences with table turning were positive. Rudyard Kipling blamed the mental illness suffered by his sister Alice (or 'Trix') on her involvement in spiritualism, originally begun by their mother and her sisters who experimented with table turning. (See 'Table-turning: A Brief Historical Note mainly of the period 1847-1853' by Brian Nisbet in *Journal of the SPR*, 1973, v.47, 96-106; *Victor Hugo* (1956) by André Maurois; *Natural and Supernatural*, 1977, by Brian Inglis).

Atmosphere and temperament appear very important to success. For the safety of the individuals concerned it is desirable, so far as possible, to omit all persons of a nervous disposition, those endowed with vivid imaginations, and people who are argumentative or antagonistic. Séances arranged by religious groups usually commence with hymn singing, and a crucifix sometimes prominently displayed. The significance of these precautions has been described as "ensuring that evil entities are not contacted". But these preliminary rituals – often derided by cynical observers

– may actually play an important part in psychologically priming the participants and lowering the barriers for paranormal effects to occur.

Kenneth Batchelor, a psychologist in England, embarked on a long-running series of experiments from the 1960s to the mid-1980s, with groups re-creating the conditions of table turning practised in the 19th century. His different groups succeeded in producing dramatic phenomena in the form of rapping sounds and the violent rocking and levitation of tables. Some of his films and recordings can be seen on YouTube videos but, unfortunately, most of the film footage has been lost (reportedly destroyed by a family member who disapproved). However, notebooks and records survive and are part of an ongoing research project. Batchelor found there was a psychological component to events in that instances of PK could be triggered by a staged incident that sitters believed was genuine. Once sitters saw what they thought was a genuine paranormal incident, actual examples could follow, as though a psychological block or barrier had been removed. To achieve physical effects it seemed necessary to suspend the scepticism and resistance of the conscious mind to the occurrence of PK events (just the idea of which a number of people found disturbing). Once this threshold was crossed, it seemed the powers of the unconscious mind were released. Thus, whilst certain researchers have proposed discarnate spirits as an explanation, such experimental evidence as exists might point in the direction of the communications being the product of the

unconscious mind – or a collection of minds. This seems to me a plausible interpretation at this stage of our knowledge, although difficult areas remain, as Batchelor admitted. (See 'Some Experiments in Psychokinesis' by Kenneth Batchelor and DW Hunt in *Journal of the SPR* v.43, 1966).

The relationship with the unconscious mind was also demonstrated by researchers in Toronto during the 1970s with the so-called 'Philip' Group organised by the New Horizons Foundation [FT61:41, 64:61]. Members succeeded in creating psychokinetic (PK) effects that they attributed to a fictional discarnate personality. They imagined a ghost with a fictional back-story and were rewarded with unexplained raps and a moving table that performed for the camera, and even managed an appearance on a local television station (*Conjuring Up Philip: An Adventure in Psychokinesis*, 1976, by Iris Owen & Margaret Sparrow).

Of course, sceptics will argue unconscious muscular action and the power of autosuggestion (however that works) explain all. Yet identical effects are reported across the generations, from genteel Victorian ladies through to the awestruck psychic investigators and members of the public at Much Wenlock Guildhall in January. If the movement of their table was the product of unconscious PK, in choosing the Guildhall Paranormal Friends may have found a perfect theatrical setting to stimulate the unconscious mind into generating psychokinetic effects. Or could it be that individuals are connecting with some higher, transformative force as Batchelor began to believe in his final years?

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PREDICTIONS

The world's only 'asparamancer' casts the spears and sees weird weather, while the prophecies of Baba Vanga point to an Islamic caliphate in Europe

SPEARS OF DESTINY

A fortune-teller who allegedly predicted Brexit has revealed her top tips for 2017. Jemima Packington, 61, from Bath, chucks asparagus spears in the air and makes forecasts based on how they land. The self-styled 'asparamancer' says the US will become a pariah state under Trump, several other countries will withdraw from the EU, while Britain's economy will boom. There may be "troubling times" for the royal family and our bizarre weather will worsen with summer downpours. A showbiz couple considered national treasures will split (usefully vague, that one). Ms Packington claims to have "a very good success rate". Last year she said that "the British public will rebel about the Nanny State" (interpreted as the Leave vote in the EU Referendum); but she also said that Boris Johnson would become leader of the Conservative Party and Jeremy Corbyn would be ousted as Labour leader. On well, you win some, you lose some.

She was inspired to start "reading the spears" aged eight, after seeing her grandmother practise with tealeaves. Plenty of people use slightly offbeat 'tools', she says, but she came to use asparagus because "it's so accurate". She's tried other vegetables, like broccoli, but they don't seem to work. She uses only English asparagus, and believes harvests from the Vale of Evesham, Worcestershire, are the finest: "Nothing can beat 'Vale gras'." Asparagus growing in the Vale of Evesham dates back at least to 1768. There's no call for the intrigue of purple asparagus, apparently, or the nutty subtlety of the white variant. *D. Telegraph, 19 Jan; Sun, 31 Dec 2016.*

BABA VANGA'S PROPHECIES

Another fortune-teller who features in the news every New Year (at the very least), even though she died in 1996, is the blind Bulgarian mystic,



ABOVE: Jemima Packington and her mystic veg. FACING PAGE: Blind Bulgarian prophetess Baba Vanga.

clairvoyant and herbalist Baba ('Grandmother' or 'Auntie') Vanga, known as the "Nostradamus of the Balkans" thanks to a purported 85 per cent success rate. Long revered in Russia and Europe, she was said to have foreseen WWII, the coming to power of the Communists in Bulgaria in 1944, the death of Stalin, the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, an earthquake in northern Bulgaria in 1985, the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, the Fukushima nuclear spill and the birth of Daesh.

Of the hundreds of predictions Vanga made over 50 years, a large number alluded to natural and climate change-related disasters. Back in the 1950s she said: "Cold regions will become warm... and volcanoes will awaken. Everything will melt, just like ice... A huge wave will cover a big coast covered with people and towns, and everything will disappear beneath the water." Though conveniently non-specific, this was seen as a reference to the 2004 tsunami and earthquake.

She had a more specific hit in 1980 – though some who were

She tried other vegetables, but they don't seem to work

close to her claim it is fiction. She is supposed to have said: "Kursk will be underwater, and the whole world will be weeping over it... it can happen in 1999 or in 2000. But it would happen for sure in the month of August." At the time the citizens of Kursk, safely inland, had no reason to be alarmed. In 1999 Vanga's predictions were broadcast on Russian television, again causing no particular concern; but then the Russian nuclear submarine *Kursk* sank in August 2000, the crew dying over several days while international rescue crews tried in vain to retrieve the vessel from the depths [FT140:7].

Baba Vanga – or Vangeliya Pandeva Dimitrova, known after her marriage as Vangeliya

Gushterova – was born in 1911 in what is now Macedonia, but spent most of her life in the Rupite area in Bulgaria's Kozhuh mountains. She claimed that she lost her eyesight at the age of 12 during a freak tornado, when she was flung into the air and dashed to the ground. She was found in a terrible state after a long search, her injured eyes sealed shut and encrusted with a thick layer of sand and dust. Too poor to afford specialist care, she was relegated to a life of blindness. She later said that she had experienced her first vision during the days she was missing and believed she had been instilled with the ability to heal people and predict the future.

During the 1940s she developed a cult following and was considered something of a national treasure [FT93:8]. It's thought that she helped over a million people in her lifetime. The Bulgarian King Boris III visited her in 1942, and she later served as an adviser to Todor Zhikov and other Bulgarian Communist Party leaders. Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev allegedly consulted her before making key decisions. Politicians, scientists and historians would come from all over the world for a few minutes in her company. She was kept under surveillance by the Bulgarian secret service and her home bugged.

Vanga purportedly predicted another 'realm of being', claiming that entire cultures would begin to spread through a 'false world'. She claimed that in 2003, any person would be able to think in synchronicity with others, allowing for a form of secondary existence. 2003 marked the year of release of the game *Second Life*, in which an account holder can make an avatar and engage in social interaction with others.

In 1989 Vanga seems to have predicted 9/11: "Horror, horror! The American brethren (Twin

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The myth

Despite their great bulk and unwieldy shape, hippopotamuses are powerful and graceful swimmers.

The “truth”

Despite being land mammals that are extremely well adapted to spending much of their time in water, and their closest evolutionary relatives being whales and porpoises, hippos can't actually swim. What they can do very well is hold their breath by closing their nostrils, which means that if they want to get from one part of the river to another they simply walk along the bed, under water. Their webbed feet help them bound or skip, just lightly pushing off from the bottom. When spending time underwater, a hippo will automatically bob up to the surface every three to five minutes to take in air – even when it is fast asleep. Having filled its lungs, it sinks down again, using breathing and body position to control its buoyancy. And when it's time to get out of the water, hippos don't swim for the shore – they walk to the shallows and climb out.

Sources

BBC Wildlife Magazine, Dec 2009; <http://animals.Sandiegozoo.Org/animals/hippo>; <http://indianapublicmedia.Org/amomentofscience/do-hippos-swim/>; <http://animals.Nationalgeographic.Com/animals/mammals/hippopotamus/>

Disclaimer

Most sources insist that hippos are non-swimmers. Many go further, saying that the big buggers can't even float. But some hedge their bets, implying that while adult hippos can't swim, their young can. Meanwhile, an article on the *National Geographic* website carries the bald statement that hippos are “good swimmers”. We'd be glad to read, on FT's letters page, the views of any passing hippologists.

Mythchaser

We've all heard that in Elizabethan times people of fashion would paint their teeth black, to make them look rotten, because this suggested that they were wealthy enough to eat a diet rich in sugar. But that really does taste like a myth, doesn't it? Is there any contemporary evidence for this fad, or is it just a load of rot?



Towers?) will fall after being attacked by the steel birds (hijacked planes?). The wolves will be howling in a bush (George Bush?) and innocent blood will gush.” At some point she said: “Crimea will detach from one shore to be attached to another”, apparently foretelling Putin's annexation of the peninsula in 2014. She correctly predicted that the 44th president of the United States would be African American. However, she also stated that he would be “the last US president”. She said that by 2016 “Muslims” would invade Europe, which would “cease to exist” as we know it (that was a dud prediction). The ensuing campaign of destruction will last years, she said, driving out populations and leaving the entire continent “almost empty” by 2025.

There follows a selection of Baba Vanga's prophecies. 2023: the Earth's orbit will change. 2028: mankind will fly to Venus in hope of finding new sources of energy. 2033: world water levels will rise as the polar ice caps melt. 2043: Europe will be an Islamic

caliphate with Rome as its capital; the world's economy will thrive under Muslim rule. 2066: America will use a new climate change weapon for the first time in a bid to retake Rome and bring back Christianity. 2076: Communism will return to Europe and the rest of the world. 2100: man-made sun illuminates the dark side of the planet. 2130: with the help of aliens, civilisations will live underwater. 2170: major global drought. 2187: two large volcanic eruptions will be successfully stopped. 2201: temperatures drop as the Sun's thermonuclear processes slow down. 2354: an accident on the artificial sun will result in more drought. 2480: two artificial suns will collide and leave the Earth in the dark. 3005: a war on Mars will change the trajectory of the planet. 3010: a comet will hit the Moon. The Earth will be surrounded by a ring of rock and ash. By 3797, everything on Earth will be dead. However, human civilisation will be advanced enough to move to a new star system. *Pravda.ru*, 5 June 2014; *news.com.au*, 8 Dec; *D.Mail*, 10 Dec 2015.





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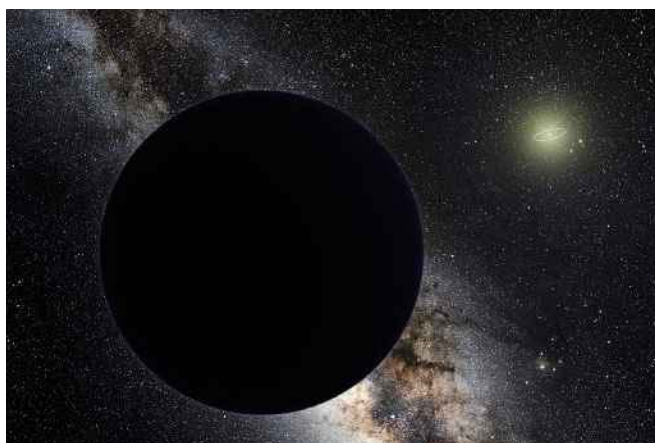
VAST NOTHINGNESS PUSHES MILKY WAY, TIME'S ARROW GOES BACKWARDS, PLUS THE PUZZLE OF PLANET NINE...

COSMIC DEAD ZONE

A new 3-D map of more than 8,000 galaxies indicates that the Milky Way is being pushed by a vast patch of nothingness half a billion light years from Earth, on the far side of the constellation of Lacerta, the Lizard. This cosmic dead zone may account for as much as half the force that propels our home galaxy through the heavens at 2,000,000 km per hour (1,243,000 mph). It has long been evident that the Milky Way and its neighbouring galaxy, Andromeda, are being pulled by the gravitational attraction of the most massive structure in the observable universe – the Shapley attractor, a dense ‘supercluster’ of galaxies 750 million light years away. Now, it seems, we are not only being pulled, but pushed. *Guardian*, 31 Jan 2017.

THE JANUS POINT

There's nothing in the laws of physics that insists time must move forward. In trying to solve the puzzle of why time seems to move in only one direction, many physicists have settled on entropy, the level of molecular disorder in a system, which continually increases (Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics). However, two separate groups of prominent physicists have been working on models that examine the initial conditions that might have created the arrow of time, and both seem to show time moving in two different directions. When the (hypothetical) Big Bang created our universe, these physicists believe it also created an inverse mirror universe where time moves in the opposite direction. (We won't go into the mathematical nitty-gritty here.) The physicists call the moment before expansion the “Janus point,” after the two-headed Roman god. “Time is not something that pre-exists,” said Julian Barbour from the University of Oxford. “The direction and flow of time we have to deduce from what's



ABOVE: Artist's impression of Planet Nine as an ice giant eclipsing the central Milky Way, with the Sun in the distance. Neptune's orbit is shown as a small ellipse around the Sun.

happening in the universe. When we look at it that way, it's natural to say that time begins at that central point and flows away in opposite directions.”

Flavio Mercati from the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics commented: “We're on one side of the Janus point. On one side you get your arrow of time and can never experience the other one. It's in your past.” He believes we can never have direct experience of the ‘mirror universe’. The theory is based on classical physics and is far from definitive; once questions of quantum physics are introduced, all bets are off. “Instead of having two streams emanating from a river,” said Prof Barbour, “it could be more like a fountain where you have lots of pairs of springs. Or just a whole host of springs flowing out of a fountain in different directions.”

Lord Rees, the Astronomer Royal, adds another complication: “Many people suspect that our Big Bang was not the only one, but there's a whole archipelago of Big Bangs,” he told the Hay Literary Festival in Wales last May. He added that other universes may exist unconstrained by the laws of Newtonian physics, with different atoms and gravitational fields. The highly

controversial theory that there were multiple Big Bangs as part of a wider ‘multiverse’ was first proposed by Prof Andrei Linde, now at Stanford University. *qz.com*, *cnet.com*, 18 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 1 June 2016.

PLANET NINE

Over the past two decades, astronomers have detected more than 2,000 planets orbiting stars other than our Sun. A year ago, researchers floated the possibility of an undiscovered large planet at the far edge of the Solar System. Today, astronomers are none the wiser about what is being called Planet Nine, or whether it even exists. (‘Planet Nine’ of our Solar System used to be Pluto, but this heavenly body was downgraded from planetary status in 2006.) Most are sceptical, but the mathematical models used to predict the new planet continue to suggest that there is something out there five to 15 times the mass of the Earth. Efforts to spot it continue, but this is a huge challenge given that it supposedly orbits 20 times further from the Sun than does the gas giant Neptune. The latter orbits the Sun every 165 years, but it takes ‘Planet Nine’ about 17,000 years. This makes a direct observation very difficult,

even using the world's most powerful telescopes.

It comes down to the ability of mathematics to make astronomical predictions – which led, for instance to the discovery of Neptune. William Herschel spotted the latter's closer twin, Uranus, in 1781, but two decades later it was clear there was a wobble in its orbit, implying there was something else out there. John Couch Adams and Urbain Jean Joseph Le Verrier used maths to pinpoint its location, and Johann Gottfried Galle used their data to observe Neptune in 1846.

Calculations by Konstantin Batygin and Mike Brown of the California Institute of Technology predicted ‘Planet Nine’ after noticing the unusual orbits of a cluster of bodies in the Kuiper Belt, far beyond Neptune. The points of closest approach of these objects to the Sun, known as their perihelia, almost coincide. Moreover, these perihelia all lie near the ecliptic – the plane of Earth's orbit and also, approximately, that of the other planets – while the objects' orbits are all angled at 30 degrees below the ecliptic. Something is shepherding them (and it's not Nibiru, which, according to the late Zecharia Sitchin, is an enormous planet on an eccentric 360,000-year orbit, home to the Anunnaki who created *Homo sapiens* and the ancient Sumerian culture).

Not all astronomers agree that ‘Planet Nine’ is the solution to the puzzle; maybe a massive body previously ejected from the Solar System is to blame. As we say at Fortean Towers: “For every expert there is an equal and opposite expert”. Ironically, it was the aforementioned Dr Brown as much as anyone who was responsible for Pluto's downgrading, for he discovered Eris, an object almost as big as Pluto, in 2005. He uses the handle ‘Pluto-killer’ on Twitter. *Guardian*, *D.Telegraph*, 21 Jan; *Economist*, 23 Jan; *D.Mail*, 21+25 Jan 2016; *Irish Times*, 12 Jan 2017.

NECROLOG

This month, we survey the profoundly fortean life of a romantic catastrophist and 'hamacologist' who came back from the dead to live as a modern shaman...

HAN KLOOSTERMAN

Han Kloosterman's geological career commenced with his dissertation *Le Volcanisme de la région d'Agde, Hérault, France* (Utrecht, 1959) and thrived with his alluvial prospecting – cassiterite, diamonds and gold – for mining companies in West Africa and Brazil. In this period, he published in professional journals and adopted a catastrophist perspective, supporting the view that Earth history is punctuated by violent discontinuities. His first foray into catastrophism was a "revelation" he had during a trip down the Jamanxim River in 1973, when he discovered the contours of a giant caldera. He founded, edited and published the ephemeral journal *Catastrophist Geology* (1975-1978).

He was arrested in the Netherlands in 1961 for evasion of military service and interned in an army base. He went absent without leave, crossing the border into Germany, boarding a train to Switzerland and flying thence to Dakar. At the risk of being traced, he flew on to Rio de Janeiro with money borrowed from the Dutch consulate and remained in exile for 12 years, without a passport, until his offence had expired. When geological work dried up in 1983, Kloosterman returned to the Netherlands, where he took courses on parapsychology, hypnosis and Mesmerism.

As the world's sole living 'hamacologist', he argued that the use of native American hammocks never leads to pressure ulcers – because the weight of the body is distributed over a much larger surface than on a mattress – and that their design cannot have been a chance discovery, as it was based on the ellipsoid. He defended this position at an exhibition in the Netherlands on the cultural history of the hammock which he organised in 1992. He slept on a hammock



wherever he could, notably in his own home.

Arguably the pivotal event in Kloosterman's life was his miraculous 'return from the dead'. In 1993, he was diagnosed with terminal throat cancer and, having disposed of all his books and papers, he travelled back to Rio de Janeiro in order to die there in the company of his ex-wife and three children. Four months on, he had lost 77lb (35kg), but the disease had gone into remission and to the astonishment of his doctors he was soon tumour-free. He soon recognised psychosomatic origins of the cancer in his unemployment, divorce and self-censorship, but this was of little practical help, as the destruction of his official documents prior to his 'death' prevented him from leaving Brazil until 1999.

Kloosterman spent three months convalescing among a coastal group of Guaraní, surviving on an exceedingly meager Brazilian state pension. His life took a dramatic turn

in 1998, when someone presented him with a copy of Walter Alvarez's book *T. rex and the Crater of Doom* (1997). According to Alvarez, a carbon-rich layer found in 1985 by Wendy Wolbach at the boundary between the Cretaceous and the Tertiary periods demonstrated that a global conflagration – caused by an asteroid impact – had contributed to the demise of the dinosaurs. This reminded Kloosterman of the Usselo horizon, a similar sooty, charcoal-rich layer in the late-glacial Allerød stage of northwest Europe, which he had interpreted – as early as 1977 – in terms of a *Weltbrand* associated with the extinction of the Pleistocene megafauna. Finding that neither Alvarez nor Wolbach had heard of Usselo, the insight prompted Kloosterman to fly to Holland the next year to start a new geological project – the catastrophic end of the last glacial period.

Until his death, Kloosterman busied himself networking,

collecting literature and geological samples of the Usselo layer both from Arizona and 12 sites in northwest Europe and studying the direction of tektite falls. His research received a boost in 2005, when the American scientists Firestone and West integrated the Usselo horizon into their model of a cometary impact over North America – a potent hypothesis that remains the focus of intense research and debate. From 2003 onwards, Kloosterman also compiled a database on catastrophist mythology, which – apart from deluges and fires – focused on collapse of the sky and the *axis mundi*, overturning of the Earth, pole shift and inversion of the Sun's movement. In this set of motifs he saw evidence for the late Peter Warlow's theory that the Earth has repeatedly toppled over in the fashion of a tippe top, modified by Stig Flodmark's demonstration that only the crust and mantle will turn over, leaving the core in its original place. One such inversion arguably occurred around the same time as the Allerød conflagration. Kloosterman perceived a growing schism between a new orthodoxy of catastrophists who will only accept impact scenarios and more extreme ones who also consider Earth inversions.

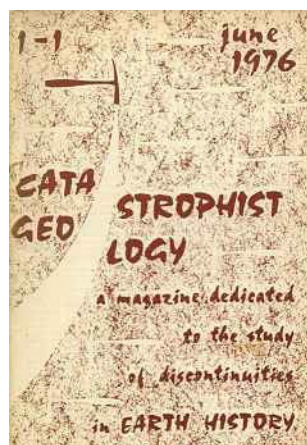
With this work and his *Catastrophist Manifesto* (2007), Kloosterman ranked as the only professional Dutch scientist promoting secular catastrophism – secular indeed, as he despised Christianity: in dating, he preferred the abbreviations 'BC' (before censorship) and 'AD' (*anno diaboli*). With dignity, he resigned himself to his inexorable banishment to what he often called the 'lunatic fringe' of science.

Two early losses inspired longstanding interests. A Jewish girl called Froukje van Leeuwen had been one of his classmates in primary school in Utrecht.

The discovery that her sudden disappearance had been due to her deportation to Sobibor waxed into indomitable philosemitism, a trait which frequently caused Kloosterman to fall out with others. Similarly, when Kloosterman learned that Mary Saydee, a winsome Kru girl he had dated in Liberia, had been kidnapped by a secret society to be sacrificed to the sea god, the result was a scholarly fascination with human sacrifice, including anthropophagy.

Kloosterman became a passionate vegetarian during a trip to India in the late 1970s. This happened quite impulsively; he discovered his motivation only a year afterwards – as a protest against the gods which allow us to be born on a cruel planet with food-chains. Mastering seven or eight European languages, he qualified as a polyglot. Tragically, chemotherapy cost him all his teeth and he developed a speech impediment as a result. He was an avid compiler of research notes, which he filed in shoeboxes, a bibliophile and a voracious reader. He encouraged the free selfless sharing of bibliographic references and ideas. Among his friends was Simon Vinkenoog, Poet Laureate of the Netherlands (2004), while he enjoyed personal meetings with Arthur Koestler, Jacques Vallée, Guy Lyon Playfair and other 'alternative' thinkers. With some delight he noted that his ideas regarding the Earth's overturnings were too extreme even for Andrew Collins and Robert Schoch.

Among the myriad unorthodox opinions he championed – some untenable, some frivolous, some original – were the suggestions that the boomerang was a divine invention; that the Wise Old Goat is seen perusing the Internet in a comic strip of Rupert Bear from the 1920s; that tapeworms, not humans, top the food chain; that the Indo-European language is fictitious (a view he later retracted), unlike many of his own free-style etymological connections between global languages; that the persecution of witches and werewolves only gained traction after the Middle Ages because at that time not enough Jews remained west of Warsaw; that the



late 20th century had its own witch-hunt in women's false accusations of sexual abuse by their fathers obtained under hypnosis; that it was under collective hypnosis that the Germans could commit their atrocities during the Nazi regime; that anti-Zionism is simply a disguised reincarnation of anti-Semitism; that Christianity and Islam are not religions, but control systems; that life evolves through 'psycho-Lamarckism' instead of Darwinian evolution, meaning adaptations supervised by spiritual entities; that the academic system of peer review is tantamount to the censorship of the erstwhile *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, while the anonymity preserved in it was based on the hooded judges of the Inquisition, an invitation to corruption; that the academies of science need the equivalent of a Freedom of Information Act for the benefit of science historians; that the second half of the 20th century

saw the apparent return of animal speech, such as in chimpanzees, dolphins and parrots, and the arrival of animal painting; that the higher self or *alter ego* of each of us determines the plot of our lives; and that a scientifically advanced civilisation had existed during the Ice Age. Far out though some of these contentions may seem, Kloosterman remained a lifelong critical thinker who would refuse to offer advice on anything and always recommended a healthy dose of scepticism.

Kloosterman made no secret of his belief that he was destined to become a latter-day shaman, failing which he was at least a prophet. This conviction serves as an underlying template binding many strands of his life together.

First, he would compare the remarkable 'resurrection' following many months on his 'deathbed' to the symbolic calling and initiation of many a shaman. During the depression that immediately preceded the disease, his body had felt like an aggregate of seven separate fragments instead of a single whole – a description reminiscent of the classic shamanic *rite de passage* of dismemberment. The cancer was only one in a long series of serious ailments, including 28 cases of malaria, six bouts of amoebic dysentery, leishmaniasis and bilharzia. Kloosterman would often flippantly remark that he had 'already died'.

Second, he claimed to draw energy from heavenly bodies. When stricken with malaria in 1969, he was flown to a nearby hospital in

a Cessna aircraft, which crashed into the Amazonian rainforest due to engine failure. Forced to walk back to civilisation, he felt that the disease had suddenly lifted when the magical interplay of sunlight with the river communicated such to him spiritually. Back in rainy Holland, he practised solar yoga for six years, gazing directly at the Sun for one or two hours.

Third, he preferred to live a simple life, close to the wilderness, as a primitive outside observer of the Western world. While his survival of the Dutch hunger winter (1944-1945) as a child had trained him to live on little food, his many years prospecting and his sojourn among the Guaraní had taught him to sleep rough in a hammock or sleeping bag without the benefit of a tent. Upon his return to Europe, Kloosterman prided himself on being a professional vagabond, hitchhiking across 10 European countries for three months and refraining from personal hygiene.

Fourth, he was the recipient of a range of spontaneous paranormal experiences: the chloroform used in a tonsillectomy at the age of six induced an out-of-body experience, of which he had many more in middle age. In 1962, he experienced X-ray vision, seeing people's skulls through their heads and their entire lifelines, from birth to death. During his three-month tour of Europe, he sensed the guidance of a personal 'daemon', who would communicate a positive answer to any raised question by an involuntary shaking of his shoulders, not unlike the 'sign' of Socrates. And following a dream in which a she-bear had saved his life, he came to view the bear as a sort of shamanic 'familiar' and erected a home altar to pay homage to it.

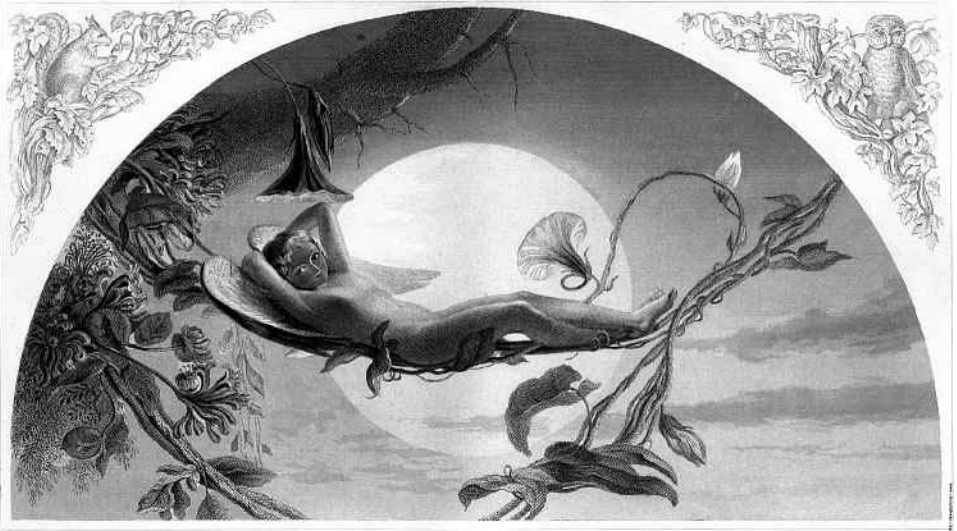
Fifth, he cultivated a deep, active interest in the spiritual world, fostering his animistic outlook on life. He frequently experimented with psychotropic and especially hallucinogenic substances, including ayahuasca, marijuana and fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*). On an intellectual level, he embarked on the psychological studies mentioned above with a special emphasis on the notions of a 'guardian angel' or 'higher self', reincarnation, and the

consciousness and conscience of animals other than humans. He developed the theory that a 'materialist coup' had occurred in 1860, which purged the sciences of all catastrophist elements, banished the Romantic movement to the margins of society and stripped Mesmerism of all spiritual and paranormal elements, which it had hitherto embraced, including the full range of altered states of consciousness.

Sixth, Kloosterman's prophetic efforts are perhaps best gleaned in the many Persian quatrains he composed since the 1990s in no less than six languages – of which he claimed the Italian ones to have been directly dictated by a muse, as he did not speak Italian; this would happen after an hour of Venus-gazing in the evening or during a hypnopompic state in the morning, when he would see the verse inscribed in fat black letters on a large whiteboard. Entirely in the style of Omar Khayyám's *Rubaiyat*, the verses convey the cynical message that immoral, manipulative gods designed life on this 'science-fiction planet' of food-chains in the fashion of a concentration camp, a farm or a school. Fort's words "we are property" found a sympathetic ear with our poet. Even Kloosterman's disinclination to put pen to paper, other than for poetry, can be seen in the light of mystics such as Pythagoras and Parmenides, who were loath to write.

People close to Kloosterman often described him as a 'man of coincidences'. I myself was introduced to him by two people in different countries who did not know each other. Weeks after my first meeting with Kloosterman, my wife and I bumped into him in the Louvre, although we had at no point discussed each other's travel plans. It seems only fitting, then, that Kloosterman gave up the ghost on the day of the closest supermoon since 1948, while a double rainbow was photographed over the funeral building just before his final dispatch.

Johan Bert Kloosterman, geologist and mineralogist, born Nijmegen 9 July 1931; died Amsterdam 14 Nov 2016, aged 85. Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

A FAILED FAIRY RESCUE

It is my favourite *true* fairy story. An Irishman is stolen by the fairies, who leave a fake body in his place. His family are oblivious, believing that he has died. After the body is buried, the father has a dream. The son appears in his sleep and explains that he has, in fact, been kidnapped by the Sidhe (the Irish fairies). To rescue him the father must come to the cross of Glendalough (Tipperary, not County Wicklow) at midnight on Midsummer Night's Eve with some whiskey, a black-hafted knife and a number of trusted companions. He is to wait till he sees his son mounted on a passing fairy horse. Then, the father and his friends must surround the son's horse and cut off the enchanted creature's right ear: only then will the father be able to rescue his flesh and blood from an eternity in fairyland.

The father and companions gather, but the spell does not work: one of the father's companions had, unbeknownst to the father, murdered three men. This cursed individual prevents the rescue party from seeing the fairies as they pass, and the son is lost for ever.

I call this story 'true' because the events described, at least those we can test historically, did actually take place. In 1837, a young man named Keating, from Newcastle in Tipperary, died. He was buried, but his father subsequently had a dream. In that dream the

son asked his father to be rescued from the fairies on midnight on 24 June at the cross at Glendalough: he also gave instructions to bring friends, whiskey and a black-hafted knife. The father, understandably, distraught, but believing in the power of the fairies to spirit away humans, gathered his neighbours together: a dead body was often claimed to

be a fairy substitute corpse.

Some 1,200 locals assembled at the cross as darkness fell on 24 June 1837 to restore the boy to his family. The hosting of the Sidhe did not show, though, and the inconvenient fact of the triple-murderer was revealed in a subsequent dream.

1,200 locals! It is a useful reminder that fairy beliefs were not just fireside chatter in Ireland two centuries ago. Many Irish men and women were prepared to act on these beliefs.

This was not paganism, in that

it elided perfectly into rural Catholicism.

But nor was it 'merely' a rag-tag of mild superstitions hung out to dry on the line of Christian belief. What should we call these beliefs? Evans-Wentz wrote, in 1911, of 'the fairy faith'. It is an expression that irritates many Irish historians, some of whom are ignorant of or indifferent to stories like the one above. But weren't the Keatings and their neighbours partaking in a faith of sorts at midnight on 24 June 1837 as the Sidhe, they believed, rode by?

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

THE FATHER
MUST COME TO
THE CROSS WITH
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AND A BLACK-
HAFTED KNIFE



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FLYINGSAUCERY

PETER BROOKESMITH PRESENTS HIS REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

ALIENS HAVE FEELINGS TOO, YOU KNOW

Long years ago, having given forth unbelievably on alien abductions at an FT UnConvention, a commentator whose name I forget identified the cause of my scepticism: I was *in denial*. The implication being that I was an abductee myself, but could not face the Truth and the Facts. And of course to deny one is in denial merely compounds the diagnosis, doesn't it? Today, however, I can reveal that I have indeed been abducted (although that is not quite the right word) by aliens, no less than three times and, at their own special request, will reveal the truth about them here. Better yet, I have a witness to all the events I shall describe. Eat your heart out, Linda Cortile.

This is how it all fell out. I was abed and asleep and a-snoring. Lying at my side, my wife was awake and became aware of presences in the room. She heard a chirruping voice like a chipmunk's: "Has she been blocked?" She found she was powerless, unable to move or speak. Somehow they took my consciousness out of my body and, even more somehow, allowed hers to observe but not participate in what was happening to me throughout. She described this as "being there but not there, as if I were on a Big Wheel and you were on another ride in the fairground below." One of the curiosities of the episodes was that neither of us could make out much about the physical appearance of the entities: we had to make do with the tone of their voices, intuition, and some corner-of-the-eye impressions. And so I found myself in a room on what one supposes was their spacecraft. And what a room it was: the carpet was what we used to call 'cinema quality', a mass of swirls in orange and purple, with flecks of green. The lampshades were just as gross, in red and lime green; the wallpaper was brown and ochre block print. My hosts were very pleased with the décor, which they had hoped would make me feel comfortable and relaxed and would give me no qualms about asking to be shown the rest of the establishment: "Just say what you need." So explained their spokesman, who was elderly, silver-haired, and soft-spoken. He was dressed in a sparkly white robe, somewhat like a cassock, and (thought the wife) had the air of a wise, retired professor, perhaps of history.



THEY WERE CERTAINLY NOT GREY-SKINNED DWARVES

"Thank you for trying so hard," I said politely, "but it's not quite the right era." I'm not sure what the 'right era' would be for me, although I am very fond of Georgian interiors, but the crassest of Seventies fluorescence never did appeal. High Table in a particularly puritanical Cambridge college would have been a more relaxing place to be. My hosts betrayed no disappointment, but went on to explain why I was there at all.

This was something I had to write about and publish, so that "the people who mattered" would know the truth. They were concerned because the notion of aliens, as generally understood, was a mass of untruths that was being exploited by the unscrupulous and the gullible (no names were mentioned, sadly), and they wanted to set the record straight. They didn't abduct people and poke them in naughty places, or otherwise abuse them, and they didn't need any help with their reproductive processes, thank you: their own were perfectly effective and efficient. If they had visitors from Earth, they asked them first if they would like to come with them to learn about them or verify what they did know – although I don't recall being invited, I have to say. Perhaps the card fell off the chimneypiece. And, they insisted, they most certainly were not skinny robotic emotionless grey-skinned dwarves with bulbous black eyes, or praying mantis-like creatures. "That's all a myth." I chuckled sympathetically. After the event, though, I have wondered why they didn't make their actual appearance clearer.

I was then offered a drink, which I declined; it seems the wife was worried lest I accept. Maybe both of us had a subconscious memory of fairy-fare and its dangerously enchanting properties. Perhaps the wise elder sensed our concern too, for he responded that they never intentionally harmed humans or

caused them distress. It was important that I get this message to *the people who mattered*. It wasn't clear if this phrase meant the powers that be on Earth (few of whom, surely, pay much attention to abduction lore, or even ufology in general, although many currently seem obsessed by the thought that President Trump is alien to civilisation as we know it; see **FT350:55**). It may have meant the myth-makers. Or maybe the people at large, the ones who ultimately matter the most.

"You *will* come again." This wasn't a question or an invitation, if not quite an instruction. More a blunt statement.

"That's very German," I said, laughing. (*Vee haff arr veys*, etc.) They didn't get the joke. And then I was back in my bed, probably still snoring.

The next night I found myself back with them again. This time in a mediæval or Renaissance banquet hall, sitting in a heavy chair at a table groaning with all manner of delicious-looking comestibles. On my left sat a row of females dressed in gowns and wearing those strange headdresses (wimples?) that had two tall pointy bits and some diaphanous material floating between and down. On my right was the old professor, and at his side a row of *wazirs* or eminences of that nature. The hall was packed with people; there was a huge roaring log fire. Those at table would chew baked meats off the bone, and toss the bones to dogs lurking beneath the board, as seen in all the best 'historical' B movies. All of which was rather more congenial than the eye-blitzing Seventies horror of the previous evening, and I made no remark about the setting (or was it set?). Still wary of the fare, I said I wasn't inclined to eat or drink. "But all this was for you! We hope we've got it right." Reassured, I set to, with a trencherman's relish that in actuality I haven't felt in over a decade. To be sorely disappointed. Food and drink were insubstantial and absolutely tasteless: like eating or drinking air. School dinners were more flavoursome, even if their flavours were sometimes repulsive. Tastelessness, readers will no doubt recall, is also characteristic of fairy food. Once more my hosts iterated their message: that they were entirely harmless and were not the abusers of abductionist legend. I said I understood. And that was the end of that episode.

But not the end of my adventures. The next night I was among them again. This time I was met by an entity with a military air, soft-spoken but always precise and to the point. He told



ABOVE: The fairy feast or banquet finds its modern analogue in a number of abduction accounts, which also sometimes feature the detail of food that has no taste.

me they had no malice toward us, and nothing to hide. I was here to take a tour of the whole 'ship', and was free to go anywhere I chose. I noticed, this time, a sense of weightlessness, although objects didn't float about as they do, if allowed, in the ISS or on lunar missions. One port of call, naturally, was the pilot's cabin. Everything in it was white and dazzlingly lit. I thought my photophobia was well known, but not to them – another odd gap in their knowledge. The lights dimmed by themselves, and one could make out seats (unoccupied) and something like desks. The ceiling, like the rest of the place, was vast, and entirely transparent and non-reflective. All one could see above were stars. There were no visible controls – no dials, knobs or levers, and no digital displays, buttons or keyboards. Somehow one intuited that the 'ship' was controlled by telepathy, or something like it.

With no particular logic, I remarked that so far I'd seen only adults: I presumed there were no children here. "In your world, children are seen but not heard," said the military entity. I chuckled. "Wrong era again I'm afraid," I said – reminded of the mannerless, tyrannical little fiends one has to negotiate in street and supermarket today. And so one found oneself in a place of happy alien weenies, in the charge of a soothing old lady. "We too have marriages, but take them much more seriously than you do." In retrospect, I wonder

(not for the first time) why aliens seem to take contemporary Western decadence as the global norm. I was also shown what one took to be lecture halls, a museum full of "prior modes of transport" (which I am now unable to describe, unfortunately), and a "library of thoughts" which, I said, impressed, was very ingenious.

There was a small farewell committee: the wise old professor and his spouse (who had supervised the children), the military personage, and a very curvy female who made me smile. "We've discussed all we need, and communicated, eaten and shared together," I was told, "and you are always welcome here. You are The Ambassador. Life is short. Live well and be happy. No one knows what will happen tomorrow." I shook hands with the professor; the military man bowed, and the curvaceous person presented me with a commemorative gift. So ended the third encounter.

Titter as you may, this is all faithfully reported. Of course there is a catch or two. I have no memory whatever of these events, and cannot produce the gift I was given, to shock and awe sceptics and believers alike. The whole story was told me by the wife, who has a truly remarkable recall of her sometimes immensely convoluted dreams and whose consciousness, as noted, was present throughout as a kind of recording angel. She dreamed these three episodes over three consecutive nights, a little under three years ago. Blessed with a talent for

satire, she never quite makes it clear if she believes this is a series of genuine events, or simply takes pleasure in twitting me with the thought that she does. I tend not to recall whole dreams, but only scenes that have no obvious significance – such as driving a pickup truck with excessively dim headlights and, once I've got out, the vehicle has become a bus, leaking oil. (Go, Freudians, go go go!)

There was a sequel, some time later. Again in a dream, she had a message from the aliens ("But I don't think they were really aliens," she says cryptically) expressing some disappointment that I hadn't written this up and told their story to the world. Well, now I have, and you may address me as Your Excellency. Alert readers will have noted the holes in the story, which aren't that different in kind from the holes in other abduction accounts, such as where they came from, what they were doing here, and how come they seemed to know so much and yet so little about us. And why were they so concerned with their *amour propre*? Such logical nit-picking is probably out of place in such cases. It reminded me of nothing so much as Susan Clancy's account of trying to find 'genuine' alien abductees for her research, and discovering how many would-be volunteers just *knew* they'd been abducted, or had simply dreamed they were. At least I was saved the trouble of having to dream it all myself.

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

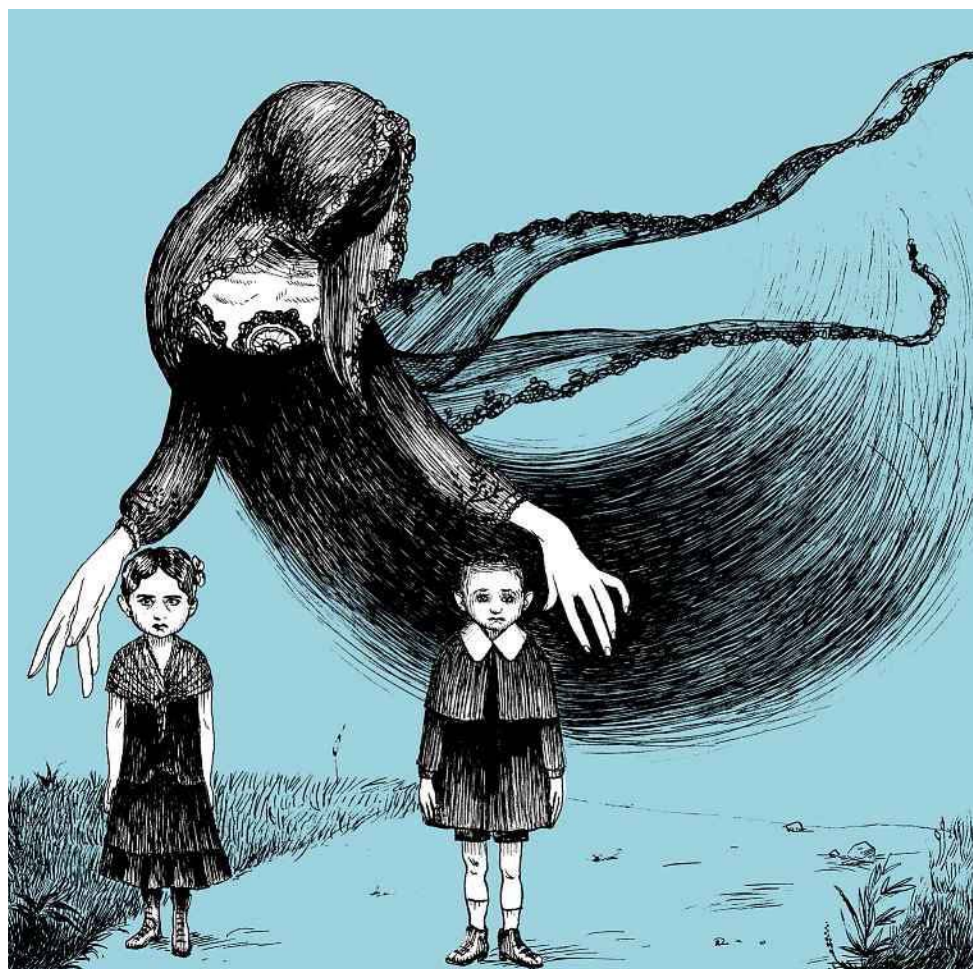
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FORTEAN TIMES BRINGS YOU THE NEWS THAT TIME FORGOT

67 LA PHANTASMA

THEO PAIJMANS looks back at the nocturnal apparitions that terrified a Mexican community in South Texas

At the intersection of two dusty Texan Highways is nestled the quiet little town of Falfurrias. Hardly 5,000 souls live there and nobody knows how the town got its name or what it means. Every year, hundreds of Mexicans trek to Falfurrias. They go there to honour Don Pedro Jaramillo, the Mexican *curandero*, or faith healer, who died 110 years ago. Don Pedro is buried just outside the little town and his shrine is a place of devout pilgrimage. A little further upstate, but still in southern Texas, is the bustling city of San Antonio. Many strange tales linger there. San Antonio is a place of ghosts and of even darker things. Generations of its children have heard about the Donkey Lady, a horribly disfigured woman living somewhere in a shack in northwest San Antonio at the end of a curved road. She can't speak, but she will scream. Her story was already old in the 1950s, its origin lost in time.¹ One night many years ago an even more frightening thing tried to claw its way into the homes of the Mexican residents of the West Side neighbourhood in San Antonio. Its coming, it was said at the time, was predicted by Don Pedro in a letter he wrote to warn the community. And when it was foiled, the apparition tried again the next year.

The night of Wednesday, 3 May 1905 was an ill-fated one for the Mexican quarter of San Antonio. There was not a door without a hastily painted sign of the cross on it. The Mexican residents of the West Side were in a state of fearful anticipation. The Phantasma was heading their way. It would visit all the Mexican families that same night. The unclean spirit had a terrible fate in store for them once it had entered their homes. The first crosses appeared before dark. "The cross was painted and chalked up on the doors and fences and gates in



CAPUCINE DESJOURS

Her face was hidden, her head wrapped in the folds of a black mantilla and "two sweet, tired children accompanied her"

the entire Mexican section of the city. The cross was designed in ashes and lime on the walks that led to the door from the streets. It was formed in some places of the holy palms that were reverently carried home from the churches on the Holy Palm Sunday."²

La Phantasma – the Apparition – as it was simply called, was a terrible sight to behold. The spectral figure was partly formless cloud,

"without substance". Below the waistline it was nothing more than vapour. From the waist up, she was a woman in black. Her face was hidden, her head tightly wrapped in the folds of a black mantilla. It was said that "two sweet, tired children" accompanied her. Her approach was stealthy and without warning. La Phantasma brought death and ill fortune. Some claimed that they had actually seen the ghost in

several sections of the West Side that night. An excited Mexican woman told how she had observed La Phantasma drifting away when it beheld a white cross upon approaching a gateway. That not everybody had seen La Phantasma, the Mexicans argued, was because she was invisible to the people who did not have a protective cross on their doors.³

A reporter tracked down the possible origin of the story: "It was difficult to find out how the theory of the ghost-woman became prevalent in the Mexican district, but at last one old Mexican woman on Concho Street was induced to tell how she had heard of the coming visitation. Some man

over farther west in the city had received a letter from Don Pedro – the Mexican healer – who used to be in San Antonio, and who has been regarded with superstitious awe ever since he was here. Don Pedro is known by the Mexicans as ‘Pedrito’; it is a term of endearment. Pedrito had written a letter to some Mexican ‘away over there’ – and the direction is indicated by a graceful wave of the hand. The letter said that the Phantasma would be in San Antonio last night – two days before El Cinco de Mayo – and that the ghost woman scattered death in her path. The tidings came from a friend of the Mexicans, and from one in whom they had faith.”

As another Mexican woman explained: “Was it not said in the letter from Pedrito that the Woman In Black would be here tonight? And has the Pedrito not always told the truth? The Phantasma is coming. The Woman In Black will this night pass the street.”⁴

Whether or not Don Pedro had actually communicated a warning in a letter is not known, but he was a spiritual beacon and a source of relief for the Mexican communities. He died in 1907, two years after La Phantasma’s reign of terror. Today he is still known and revered as the faith healer of Los Olmos and many flock to his shrine every year. Don Pedro discovered his miraculous healing powers one day when he tried to treat his nose, broken in an accident. On the third day of his self-administered treatment a disembodied voice told him that God had granted him the power to heal. “Pedro Jaramillo believed in himself; he believed that God had selected him for a work, had bestowed a vocation on him. Surely he never wavered in that belief, or he could not have dedicated himself so completely to the work at which he laboured for a full 25 years after coming to Texas from Mexico... All who knew him are agreed that he was a good man, honest and sincere, one who did all that he could to relieve the

suffering of his fellow men.”⁵

We hear no more of the terror of La Phantasma, but the scare left a deep impression. In January the following year the Mexican section of San Antonio was again in “excitement and distress” over a second visitation of the wraith. “The ‘Phantasma’ is a woman in black. None but the Mexican residents across the San Pedro have seen her; but they have, and they say her existence is real. Most of their houses have crosses in many places, and the gates are almost all adorned with crosses marked rudely in chalk. For the ‘Phantasma’ is a horrible thing to have enter the house. Her coming brings death unless she be placated by presents. Last spring the ‘Phantasma’ visited the Mexican settlement of San Antonio. Notice of her coming reached the town a few days before she arrived. On the appointed date the woman, accompanied by a child, stopped in front of a Mexican home in Laredo Street. There was a cross on the door. She passed to the next house and entered, asking for supper. The request was denied and the next day the sick child in the house died. So confident are the Mexicans who have seen the woman in black that such an apparition has appeared that the city police department has accepted their story as true. But the police are not superstitious, and they are now looking for the woman in black – whom they think is not a phantom at all, but a designing person who works upon the credulity of the ignorant Mexicans.”⁶

Reading the descriptions of La Phantasma, who kept company with one or two children, invites comparison with another wraithlike entity with similar traits. It is ‘La Llorona’, or the Weeping Woman, known for centuries throughout California, Texas, Arizona, Mexico and other parts of Latin America. La Llorona is forever searching for her two children, which she herself had drowned. “As

is generally known, Señor, many bad things are met with by night in the streets of the City; but this Wailing Woman, La Llorona, is the very worst of them all... Seeing her walking quietly along the quiet street – at the times when she is not running, and shrieking for her lost children – she seems a respectable person, only odd-looking because of her white petticoat and the white reboso with which her head is covered, and anybody might speak to her. But whoever does speak to her, in that very same moment, dies!”⁷ Collecting stories about her in Mexico City, early researcher Thomas Janvier noted over a century ago that stories of la Llorona have been told since the 16th century. Around 1585 Fray Bernardino de Sahagun admonished Mexican converts to Christianity: “Your ancestors also erred in the adoration of a demon whom they represented as a woman, and whom they gave the name Cioacoatl. She appeared clad as a lady of the palace [dressed in white]. She terrified, she frightened, and cried aloud at night.”⁸ And before that, in 1550, the Weeping Woman was first heard in Mexico City, especially on moonlit nights, where a wailing figure dressed in white would vanish in a lake.⁹

As to her origin, Janvier was convinced that La Llorona was “a direct survival from primitive times... a stray from Aztec mythology; an ancient powerful goddess living on – her power for evil lessened, but still potent – into modern times.”¹⁰ Folklorist Betty Leddy too sees this connection with the ancient Aztec pantheon. Undoubtedly there was an early, pre-Conquest body of feminine spirits that “could have facilitated the growth of La Llorona legend and that may actually be part of it”, she states.¹¹

The majority of the tales feature La Llorona as a woman in white, but there are quite a few intriguing accounts from around the Austin, Texas, area where La Llorona appears in

many different shapes and forms. Two men discovered this one night on their way to their favourite saloon when they noticed that “a very attractive woman was walking just ahead of them. They decided to follow her. The two followed for a long time, but couldn’t catch up with her. When it seemed that they were coming up even with the woman, she suddenly seemed to get about half a block ahead of them. Finally, my brother and his friend decided to turn back, but as a parting gesture they said, ‘Good-by, my dear!’ At the same time that the two said, ‘Good-by my dear!’ the attractive woman whom they had followed turned around. She had the face of a horse, her fingernails were shiny and tin-like, and she gave a long and piercing cry. It was La Llorona.”¹² Aside from descriptions of a woman with a horse’s head, others hold that “she is a woman dressed in black, having long hair, shiny tin-like fingernails and a skeleton’s face. A few believe that she is a vampire that sucks its victim’s blood. The majority insist that she is a woman dressed in white, with long black hair, long fingernails, and the face of a bat.”¹³

In this pantheon where ancient Aztec gods have transformed into modern monstrosities, La Phantasma claims her rightful and unique place. Between stories of horribly disfigured donkey ladies living in cul-de-sacs, of horse-headed wraiths accosting drunken stalkers and of wailing women in white or black running through the night shrieking and lamenting and always in search of little ones, La Phantasma occupies a contrasting niche. She does not weep or wail, and she does not search for children although she will bring them certain death. Instead, she threads her way silently through the endless night with what La Llorona is perpetually, frantically searching for but will never get: the company of a few lost little souls.

NOTES

- 1 Marcy Meffert, ‘Donkey lady Prowls Helotes’, *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, TX, 31 Mar 1977; ‘Donkey Story Leads Scribe To Stone Bull’, *San Antonio Light*, San Antonio, TX, 14 Apr 1977.
- 2 ‘West Side In Terror Of

Phantasma’, *San Antonio Express*, San Antonio, TX, 4 May 1905.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Wilson M Hudson, ed., *The Healer of Los Olmos and Other Mexican Lore*, 1951, p69.

6 ‘Startled By Woman

In Black’, *Evening News*, San Jose, CA, 1 Feb 1906.

7 ‘Weird Mexican Legend of Wailing Woman’, *Salt Lake Telegram*, Salt Lake City, UT, 15 Nov 1906; ‘The Wailing Woman, A Queer Old Legend of the city of Mexico’, *Aberdeen American*, Aberdeen, SD,

5 Jan 1907; Thomas A Janvier, *Legends of the City of Mexico*, 1910, pp134-135.

8 Janvier, pp162-163. Basil F Kirtley notes that “since the same decade that La Llorona was first mentioned in Mexico, a story, already seemingly quite old, of

‘Die Weisse Frau’ – The White lady – which reproduces many of the features consistently recurring in the more developed versions of ‘la Llorona’ was recorded in Germany.” See: ‘La Llorona and Related Themes’, *Western Folklore*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (July 1960), p157.

9 Betty Leddy, ‘La Llorona in Southern Arizona’, *Western Folklore*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (July 1948), p273.

10 Janvier, p163.

11 Leddy, p273.

12 Hudson, p76.

13 Ibid, pp73-74.

TAMÁM SHUD

THE MYSTERY OF AUSTRALIA'S UNKNOWN MAN

On 1 December 1948, a man's body was found on the beach of an Adelaide suburb. Who he was and how he died have remained a mystery for nearly 70 years, despite a trail of bizarre and tantalising clues. **ROY BAINTON** re-opens Australia's weirdest cold case file. Illustration by **HAZEL LEE SANTINO**.

I remember walking through Somerton Park, a suburb of Adelaide in South Australia, back in the early 1960s. The mainly residential seaside suburb is home to Somerton Park Beach, and whilst enjoying a cold beer there that hot day, I had no idea that this was the location of what remains the most perplexing mystery in Australia's criminal cold case files: the enduring enigma of the 'Somerton Man', or as they refer to him down under, the 'Unknown Man'.

In an age of high-tech CSI, DNA and advanced forensic science, we like to think we're pretty clever when it comes to solving murder cases. There's usually a clear motive, and a list of potential suspects soon builds up. Was it the wife/husband? Was there a girlfriend/boyfriend? A mugger? A robber? The starting point is usually the identification of the victim. Yet what happens when absolutely no one knows whose body it is? The 'Somerton Man' case is a mystery laden with curious clues, hints and false leads, none of which provide an explanation or a conclusion, even after all this time.

THE BIG SLEEP

Perhaps no one noticed the smartly dressed middle-aged man who stepped from the Melbourne train at Adelaide station at 8.30am on the morning of 30 November 1948. It had been a long journey. He bought a one-way ticket for the 10.50am train to Henley Beach, but the ticket was never used. He was carrying a small brown suitcase, which he deposited in the station's left luggage room at around 11am. At 11.15am he bought

a 7d (seven pence) bus ticket outside the station for a bus going to Somerton, but he got off somewhere along the route. Some researchers suggest that he alighted at Glenelg, close to the St Leonard's Hotel. Between 7pm and 8pm that night several witnesses claimed to have seen the man. He stopped somewhere to buy a pasty. This much is known: now the mystery kicks in.

In southern Australia, 1 December is regarded as the first day of Summer. It was warm on the evening of Tuesday 30 November when a couple decided to take a stroll along Somerton Beach. John Bain Lyons was a local jeweller, and as he and his

wife ambled along the sands in the direction of Glenelg at 7pm, they spotted a smartly dressed man reclining on the sand, his head propped up against the sea wall. He was about 20 yards away when they first noticed him. He seemed quite relaxed, with his legs outstretched and crossed. Mr Lyons had the impression that the man might be drunk, as the reclining figure lifted up

his right arm, which then fell back down. It seemed as if he might have been attempting to light a cigarette but abandoned the idea. Half an hour later, a young couple were out for a walk along the Esplanade, and they had a view of the beach from above. The reclining figure was still there, with his left arm laid out across the sand. His shoes were clean and well polished, his suit looked immaculate – yet it seemed an odd sartorial choice for beachwear. He appeared to be sleeping, but with a swarm of mosquitos around his



ABOVE: The left luggage ticket for the Somerton Man's suitcase, dated 30 November 1948.



Tamám Shud



W R G O A B A B D
M I A O
W B I M P A N E T P
M L I A B O X A I R Q C
I T T M T S A M I S T G A B



face, inspiring the young man to comment: "He must be dead to the world not to notice them."

But the man on the beach was in the deepest sleep of all – he was dead.

The following morning, John Lyons emerged from the sea after a cooling swim and was joined by two men and a horse as they gathered around the dead man, still in the same position that Lyons had seen him the night before, legs crossed and outstretched. There was an unsmoked cigarette behind his ear, and a half smoked stub resting on his collar. There were no signs of violence.

Three hours later, the body was taken to the Royal Adelaide Hospital, where Dr John Barkley Bennett estimated the man had died, possibly from heart failure, at around 2am. There was a dramatic twist when the doctor announced that he suspected the man had been poisoned. The dead man's pockets were emptied but did not reveal much. For starters, he had no cash or wallet. What was found were two combs, a box of matches, a pack of chewing gum, a pack of Army Club cigarettes and seven Kensitas cigarettes. But there was another puzzle. Any maker's name labels or tags in his clothing had been carefully cut away, and one of his trouser pockets had been stitched with orange thread.

The police had no leads as to the corpse's identity. The local press reported that the man found on the beach was one 'EC Johnson', but Johnson turned up alive and well on 31 December.¹ A full autopsy and post mortem were carried out. John Dwyer, the pathologist, found a quantity of blood

mixed with the remains of a pasty in the man's stomach. Further examination revealed the dead man had unusually small pupils, his liver was distended with congested blood, and his spleen was three times normal size. With these results, suspicions of poisoning arose. Yet no cause of death was found, and expert chemical analysis on the man's organs revealed nothing.

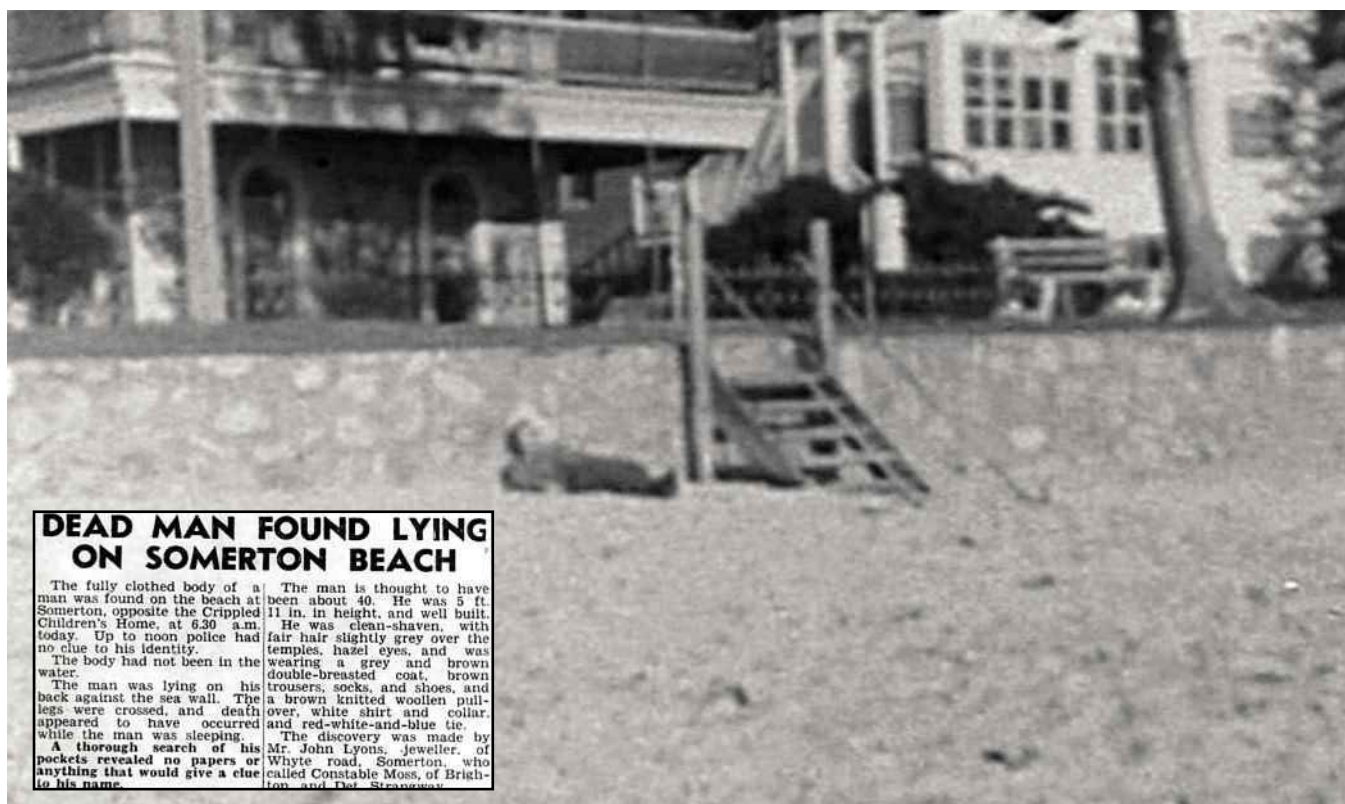
So who was this dead man? At the subsequent Coroner's inquest, the evidence of one expert, who had inspected the man's legs and feet, suggested his well-developed calf muscles and oddly shaped, pointed feet



hinted that the mystery man might have been a ballet dancer. The cadaver was preserved with formalin and a cast was made of his bust for future examination. The corpse's fingerprints were taken and circulated around the world, but with no result.

Christmas 1948 came and went with the Unknown Man still resting in the morgue. Then, in January 1949, the suitcase he had left at the railway station was discovered. When police opened it, the mystery deepened. There was a reel of orange thread. There were a few items of clothing, from which the nametags had been removed, but on three the names 'Kean' and 'Keane' remained. There was a stencil kit, the kind of thing used to stencil names on packing crates, a coat, stitched with a peculiar feather stitching, a table knife with the shaft cut down, and six pence. Although the names 'Kean' and 'Keane' looked like good leads, the police could trace no one, and the local press suggested that the labels were left deliberately as red herrings. Once again the investigation was stalled.

But the strangest evidence – the evidence that would give this case its mysterious name – came when the Emeritus Professor of Pathology at the University of Adelaide, John Cleland, was brought in during April 1949 to examine the corpse. Sewn into the waistband of the trousers was what has been referred to as 'a secret pocket'. It contained a small, tightly rolled, piece of paper bearing the printed words 'Tamám Shud'. A reporter for the *Adelaide Advertiser*, Frank Kennedy, recognised the words as Persian. They were from a work of poetry written in the 12th



DEAD MAN FOUND LYING ON SOMERTON BEACH

The fully clothed body of a man was found on the beach at Somerton, opposite the Crippled Children's Home, at 6.30 a.m. today. Up to noon police had no clue to his identity. The body had not been in the water. The man was lying on his back against the sea wall. The legs were crossed, and death appeared to have occurred while the man was sleeping. A thorough search of his pockets revealed no papers or anything that would give a clue to his name.

The man is thought to have been about 40. He was 5 ft. 11 in. in height, and well built. He was clean-shaven, with fair hair slightly grey over the temples, hazel eyes, and was wearing a grey and brown double-breasted coat, brown trousers, socks, and shoes, and a brown knitted woollen pull-over, white shirt and collar, and red-white-and-blue tie. The discovery was made by Mr. John Lyons, Jeweller, of Whyte road, Somerton, who called Constable Moss, of Brighton, and Det. Sergeant...

TOP: A close-up photograph of the unknown man. "He was clean-shaven, with fair hair slightly grey over the temples". **ABOVE:** A television documentary later mounted a reconstruction of the discovery of the mysterious body on Somerton Park Beach. **INSET:** A contemporary newspaper clipping describing the incident.



ABOVE LEFT: Detectives Dave Bartlett, Lionel Leane, and Len Brown search the suitcase found at Adelaide railway station. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Some of the contents of the suitcase, including a reel of Barbour orange sewing thread, a knife and a pair of scissors. **BELOW:** The plastercast of the dead man's head and shoulders.

century, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, and come at the very end of the English translation by Edward Fitzgerald, after the final verse. They mean literally: 'It is ended'. The slip of paper appeared to have been torn from a book, and the seemingly hopeless hunt for the original copy began. The police began to suggest that this might point to a straightforward suicide. But there was much more yet to come.

CODES AND POISONS

In June 1949 the body was buried in a plot of dry ground and sealed under concrete, a precaution in case it needed future exhumation. On 23 July a man from the Glenelg area visited the Adelaide police station and presented a very rare first edition of Edward Fitzgerald's translation of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* published in 1859 by Whitcombe and Tombs in New Zealand. The odd story he told was that the book had been tossed into the back seat of his car by persons unknown. The torn extract matched the ripped space in the book. The identity of the man who found the book was kept secret, and has remained so. In the back of the book, police found five lines of letters written in pencil, and a telephone number. The number was that of a 27-year-old nurse who had trained in Sydney's North Shore Hospital and now lived not far from where the body had been discovered. Soon local media began to refer to the mysterious lines of letters as 'code'. Was the dead man a spy?

Attention now focused on the new lead, the nurse. She appears to be as mysterious as everything else in the case, as her real name was not revealed until 2013: Jessica Ellen "Jo" Thomson, née Harkness (see 'The Jestyn Mystery', p34). In 1949, when police

THE CORONER WAS TOLD THAT A VERY RARE POISON COULD HAVE BEEN USED



interviewed her she gave a false surname, and it turns out that she wasn't actually married at the time. The police agreed to protect her identity, and the media referred to her as 'Jestyn'. When shown the plaster cast of the deceased man's head, she thought that it might be someone she knew called Alf Boxall, but said she wasn't certain. She claimed she had given a copy of *The Rubáiyát* to Boxall at the Clifton Gardens Hotel in Sydney in 1945 when he was serving as a lieutenant in the Water Transport Section of the Australian Army. Apparently she behaved very oddly when questioned, and almost fainted.² She need not have worried, because Boxall turned up, very much alive, and he brought his copy of *The Rubáiyát*, a 1924 Sydney edition, with him. He knew nothing of the dead man and had no connection to him.

The extensive international publicity³ rolled on as detectives around the globe investigated; but the man remained unidentified. As the Cold War developed, attention focused on the possibility of poisoning, a favourite weapon in espionage circles, and the strange 'codes' written in the back of *The Rubáiyát*. The Adelaide Coroner, Thomas Cleland, was informed by the eminent Professor Sir Cedric Stanton Hicks⁴ that it was possible that a very rare poison had been used which would have decomposed "very early after death". When Hicks appeared at the court hearing, he stated that the poisons he had in mind were so deadly and secret that he would not speak their names out loud; so he jotted them down on a slip of paper and passed them to the Coroner. They were digitalis and strophanthin. Hicks suggested the latter as the culprit. It originates from ouabain, a poisonous cardiac glycoside also named g-strophanthin. Somali tribesmen



THE 'JESTYN' MYSTERY

The real identity of the woman known as 'Jestyn' – whose telephone number was found in the copy of the *Rubáiyát* from which the words 'Tamám Shud' had been torn – was only revealed in 2013. In November that year, the Australian current affairs programme *60 Minutes* added a new twist to the Somerton Man case, interviewing surviving relatives of 'Jestyn', who had died in 2007. Her daughter, Kate Thomson, claimed that her mother, Jessica Ellen "Jo" Thomson, née Harkness, was the woman interviewed by the police all those years ago. She went on to claim that Jessica had in fact known the identity of the Somerton Man, but had lied to detectives: "She did know and she told me that it is a mystery that was only known to a level higher than the police force." Kate also said that she strongly suspected her mother had been a Russian spy – she apparently spoke Russian and was interested in Communism – and that she had quite possibly murdered or at least been responsible for the death of the Somerton Man.

There was more. In 1947, while unmarried, Jessica Thomson had given birth to a son named Robin, Kate's older brother. Robin's widow and daughter, Roma and Rachel Egan, also appeared in the *60 Minutes* documentary, pointing out compelling anatomical similarities that suggested the Somerton Man had been Robin's father. They lodged an application with the Attorney General of South Australia to have the body exhumed for DNA testing, but this was turned down. Derek Abbot, Rachel's husband, continued to pursue his own investigation using DNA from the Somerton Man's hair samples and from presumed relative Rachel. In 2016, American forensic genealogist Colleen Fitzpatrick presented evidence to a conference in the US that this DNA virtually confirmed Somerton Man was from the east coast of the US. Her research revealed links to a large group of relatives in Virginia, indications of Native American ancestry and genes linked to the family of American Founding Father Thomas Jefferson. *Sunday Mail (SA)*, 23 Nov 2013; *Advertiser (Adelaide)*, 1 Oct 2016; phys.org/news/2015-06-years-forensic-somerton-identity-mystery_1.html.



have long used extracts containing ouabain to poison arrows used in both hunting and warfare.⁵

So, who was the Unknown Man – and was he a spy? At Woomera, they were testing missiles and gathering intelligence. Our man died in Adelaide, which is the closest Australian city to Woomera. Many have seen this as a feasible connection. It is also possible that he boarded his train at Port Augusta, which is much closer to Woomera. Then there is the bizarre pencilled 'code' in the back of *The Rubáiyát*. What does it mean?

WRGOABABD
MLIAOI
WTBIMPANETP
MLIABOAIQC
ITMTSAMSTGAB

Code specialists around the world, including some of the best intelligence experts, and even astrologers, have been wrestling with these random characters for decades – so far without success.

MORE MYSTERIES

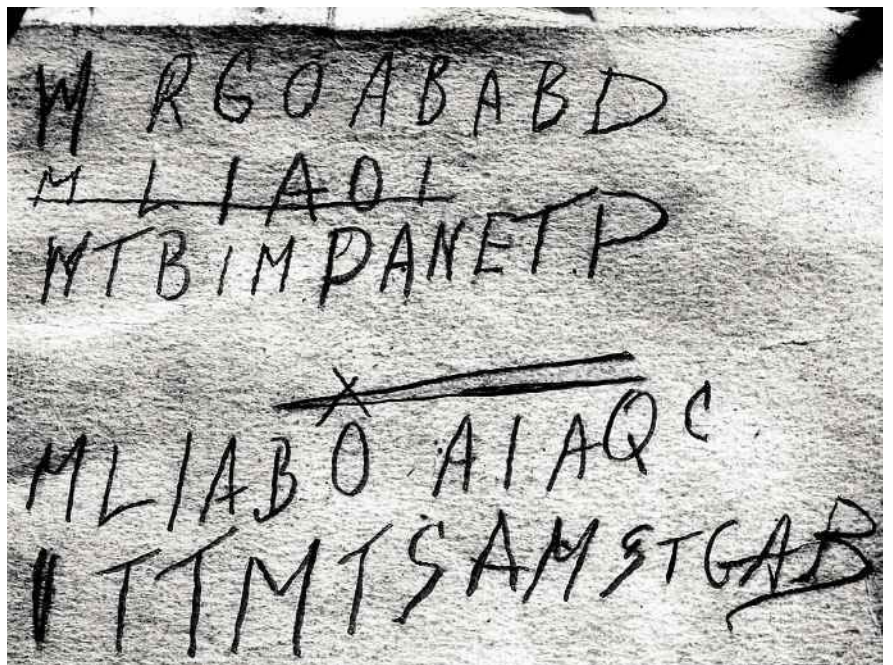
There is still an aura of mystery surrounding the nurse 'Jestyn' and her relationship with

Alf Boxall. It seems that Boxall's army career might also have involved military intelligence. 'Jestyn' died in 2007 and some believe that her real name was kept under wraps as it (or perhaps even her nickname) might have been a key to the decryption of the 'code'. Also, according to a 1978 TV documentary,⁶ when she gave Boxall her copy of *The Rubáiyát* she had written out verse 70:

*Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore – but was I sober when I swore?
And then and then came Spring, and Rose-
in-hand
My thread-bare Penitence a-pieces tore.*

Was this just a romantic gesture – or something more cryptic?

In 1947, the year before the mystery man alighted in Adelaide, the United States Army's Signal Intelligence Service was carrying out Operation Venona, during which they discovered that the Soviet Embassy in Canberra had been in receipt of top-secret information leaked from Australia's Department of External Affairs. In 1948, the US banned the transfer of all classified information to Australia. Spies would have had to work much harder that year.

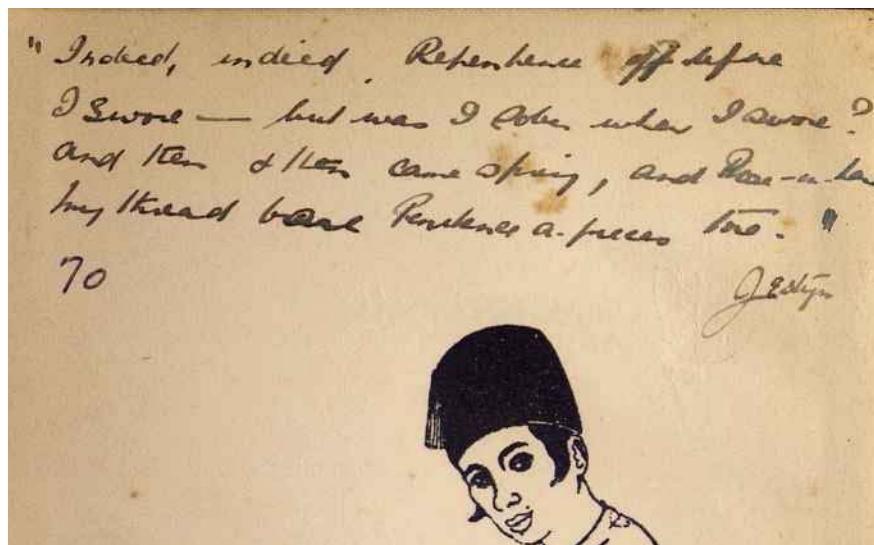


TOP: The scrap of paper torn from a rare edition of *The Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám and bearing the words "Tamám Shud". **ABOVE:** Writing found in the back of a copy of the *Rubáiyát* matching the torn fragment.

The more you dig into the murky undergrowth of the Tamám Shud case, the denser the tangled roots become. For example, in 1945, three years prior to the death of the 'Unknown Man', the body of Joseph (George) Saul Haim Marshall, a 34-year-old man from Singapore, was found in Ashton Park, Mosman, Sydney, with an open copy of the *The Rubáiyát* (reported as a seventh edition by publishers Methuen) laid on his chest. It was recorded that he'd committed suicide by poison. However, Methuen only issued five editions of *The Rubáiyát*, so either this was a reporting error or a copy of the New Zealand Whitcombe and Tombs edition. It might be just a coincidence, or some kind of synchronicity, but a quick look on Google Earth reveals that Sydney's Ashton Park is a short walk from Clifton Gardens. It was in Clifton Gardens, just two months after the dead Marshall was found with *The Rubáiyát* on his chest, that Jestyn gave Alfred Boxall a copy of the book. And who was Joseph (George) Saul Haim Marshall? It transpires that his brother was the famous barrister and Chief Minister of Singapore, David Saul Marshall. Joseph Marshall's inquest was held on 15 August 1945. A woman testified at the inquest. She was called Gwenneth Dorothy Graham. Within a fortnight of testifying, she was found naked and dead, face down in a bath with her wrists slit. Omar Khayyám seems to have had a lot to answer for.

In 1949, as the Adelaide police were still scratching their heads over the Unknown Man, at Largs North, just 12 miles (20km) along the beach from Somerton, another bizarre case unfolded. On 6 June, a two-year-old boy named Clive Mangnoson was found dead, his body in a sack. It was established that the child had been dead for 24 hours. Keith Waldemar Mangnoson, his unconscious father, was lying alongside him. The man was taken to hospital suffering from exposure and ended up in a mental institution. Father and son had been missing for four days. It gets weirder: the two were discovered by a man named Neil McRae, who said he had established their location in a dream the previous night. As with the Unknown Man, the coroner did not believe the boy had died from natural causes.

Then came the revelation by the boy's mother, Roma Mangnoson, that she'd been threatened by a masked man who almost ran her down outside her house in Largs North's Cheapside Street. The man was driving a battered, cream-coloured car. According to Mrs Mangnoson, "the car stopped and a man with a khaki handkerchief over his face told me to 'keep away from the police or else'." She believed this to be connected with the fact that her husband had previously been to identify the Unknown Man at Somerton, whom he believed to be someone he had worked with in 1939 named Carl Thompson. Local dignitaries, including the mayor of Port Adelaide, AH Curtis, and JM Gower, the Secretary of the Largs North Progress Association, received some strange, anonymous phone calls, threatening an "accident" should they "stick their nose into the Magnoson affair". The distraught Mrs Magnoson was so affected by her meetings with the police that she required subsequent



ABOVE: Verse 70 of the *Rubáiyát* inscribed by 'Jestyn' in the copy she gave to Alf Boxall at the Clifton Gardens Hotel, Sydney, in 1945. BELOW: The grave of the Unknown Man in Adelaide's West Terrace Cemetery.



medical attention.

South Australia's Major Crime Task Force still regard the Somerton Man as an open case. The South Australian Police Historical Society holds the Unknown Man's bust, which contains strands of his hair. Unfortunately, the chemicals used in embalming may have destroyed much of the DNA. In any case, a recent request to exhume the body was refused. Witness statements appear to have disappeared from police files, and the suitcase found at Adelaide Station and its contents were destroyed in 1986. There have been approaches from people in Eastern Europe who believe the Somerton Man might be one of many missing persons from the area during the Cold War. But it looks as if we may never know who he was and how he came to die on that stretch of Australian beach. So let's leave the last word to our 12th century Persian poet, Omar Khayyám:

'They change and perish all — but He remains...' Tamám Shud: 'It is ended'. **[1]**

FURTHER READING

Gerald Michael Feltus, *The Unknown Man*, Klemzig, South Australia, 2010.

Kerry Greenwood, *Tamam Shud: The Somerton Man Mystery*, University of New South Wales Publishing, 2013.

Stephen King frequently refers to this case in his novel *The Colorado Kid*, which in turn inspired the series *Haven*.

As this is an Internet *cause célèbre*, a simple Google of *Tamam Shud* will bring up dozens of links.

NOTES

1 By early February 1949, there had been eight different 'positive' identifications of the body. Some thought it was a missing stable-hand; two men from Darwin thought the corpse was that of a friend of theirs; and others suggested he was a sailor or a Swedish man. Police from Victoria suggested the man was from their state, as his the laundry marks were similar to those of dry-cleaning firms in Melbourne. Following publication of the man's photograph in Victoria, 28 people claimed they knew his identity.

2 Retired detective Gerald Feltus interviewed Jestyn in 2002 and found her to be either "evasive" or "just did not wish to talk about it". He agreed not to disclose her identity or anything that might reveal it. Feltus believed that Jestyn knew the Somerton man's identity.

3 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?l-publictag=Taman+Shud>. This site offers a selection of press coverage on the case.

4 Often mis-named as 'Stanford Hicks', Sir Cedric Stanton Hicks came to Adelaide in 1926 after an outstanding student career at the University of Otago in New Zealand, war service and a research studentship at Cambridge. He was appointed Professor of Human Physiology and Pharmacology in 1927, a position he retained until 1958 when he became Emeritus Professor. He was knighted in 1936 for his services to medical science.

5 A sufficiently concentrated ouabain dart can fell a Hippopotamus, causing respiratory and/or cardiac arrest. Only one creature is immune to its effects — the Galapagos Tortoise.

6 *Inside Story*, presented by Stuart Littlemore, ABC TV, 1978.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ROY BAINTON spent seven years in the Merchant Navy and has worked in journalism, radio and TV. He is the author of numerous books, including *The Long Patrol: the British in Germany 1945-1989*

(Mainstream, 2004), *A Brief History of 1917: Russia's Year of Revolution* (Constable & Robinson, 2005), *The Mammoth Book of Strange Phenomena* (Constable & Robinson, 2013) and *The Mammoth Book of Superstition* (Constable & Robinson, 2016). He was born in Hull and now lives in Nottinghamshire.

ANCIENT ASSASSINS?

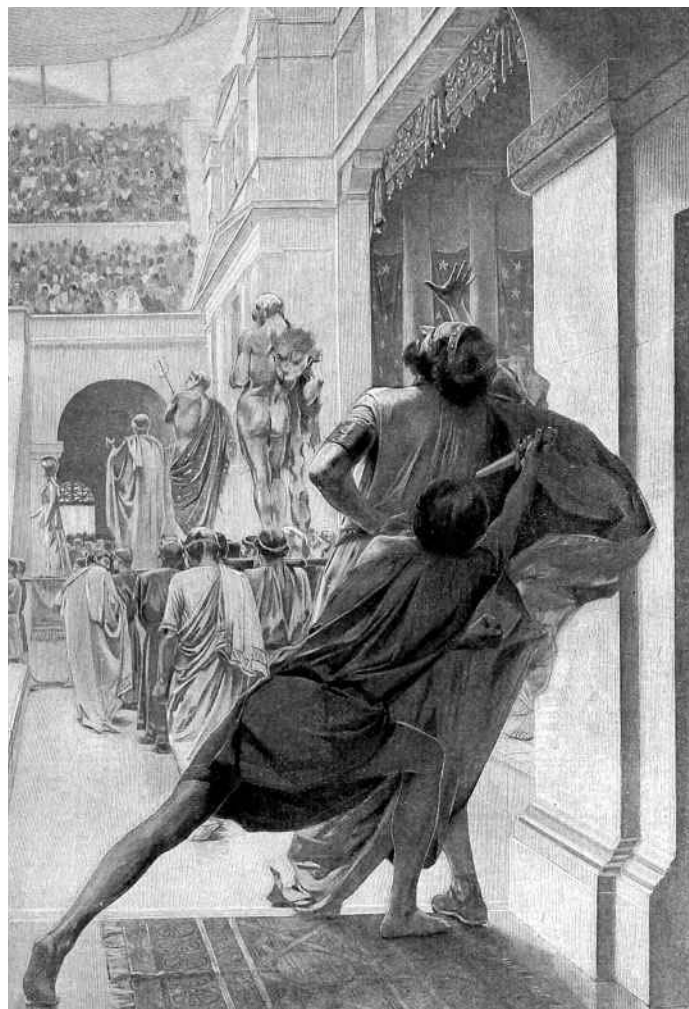
BARRY BALDWIN sifts through the evidence at a pair of classical crime scenes in an attempt to figure out who done what to whom in a saga of political conspiracy and family plots that makes *Game of Thrones* look like *The Waltons*...

At sunrise, one day in June 336 BC, watched by a huge crowd on the theatre of the old capital city of Aegæ, Philip II, King of Macedon, marched into the arena behind a ceremonial parade of statues of the 12 Olympian gods, plus an unlucky 13th, an image of himself.

His bodyguard followed at a distance: Philip wished to demonstrate that he was protected by universal goodwill and needed no weapons. Arrayed in a white ceremonial robe, he walked between two young Alexanders, his 21-year-old son, the future 'Great One', and the King of Epirus, his new son-in-law.

These festivities were part of the ritual attending the dynastically arranged and just-concluded nuptials between his daughter Cleopatra (Alexander the Great's sister) and Alexander of Epirus, brother of Philip's currently estranged wife Olympias, and one-time lover of Philip himself: in effect, the bride was also her bridegroom's niece – compare the marital tangles of ex-Stone Bill Wyman – and the marriage incestuous.

As Philip paused by the arena entrance, a young member of his Bodyguard rushed forward and stabbed the King with his sword – shades of Indira Ghandi. The 46-year-old monarch lay dead in the dust. The assassin attempted to flee – there was a horse waiting at the city gate – but tripped and fell, rather like John Wilkes Booth breaking his leg after shooting Lincoln in the Ford



LEFT: Pausanias sticks it to King Philip of Macedon in June 336 BC; but was someone else behind the assassination?

before he could betray his paymaster? If so, who was he or (remembering the *Manchurian Candidate*) she?

THE PAUSANIAS PLOT

No mystery about the killer. He was Pausanias, himself of aristocratic if not royal blood, famous for his good looks. Attracted by these, Philip had earlier made this youth his lover before switching his fickle affections to another. The jilted Pausanias made a huge scene, crudely insulting his replacement, who, however, soon proved his manhood and devotion by sacrificing his own life in battle to save Philip's. Another tangle of relationships is darkly relevant: this gallant catamite was a 'good friend' of Attalus, one of Philip's crack generals, and whose niece, Cleopatra, just happened to be one of the king's five wives.

To teach Pausanias a lesson, Attalus invited him to dinner, got him drunk (never difficult with Macedonians), then along with other guests took it in turns to rape him while onlookers cheered and jeered,

and then handed him over to his stable-boys for more of the same. When able to walk again, Pausanias sought audience with the King and laid charges against Attalus. Though not unsympathetic to his ex-lover, Philip could not afford to lose his general's military services, whilst his other ear was commandeered by wife Cleopatra on her

Theatre. A gaggle of Macedonian noblemen who had begun a pursuit caught up, but instead of seizing him for arrest, they (Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby leap to mind) butchered him with their weapons.

An impulsive act of revenge? Or the calculated finale to a conspiracy? Did someone want to shut a hired sword's mouth

uncle's behalf. So, first he temporised, then affected to treat the incident as a prank, dismissing the charges out of hand.

Motive enough here, you'd think, for Pausanias. Indeed, Aristotle agrees, a single sentence in his *Politics*¹ flatly stating that Pausanias did what he did because of what Attalus had done to him. This remark, often overlooked by modern writers, might seem to undermine their more lurid scenarios. But, as we'll see, Aristotle may himself have been accomplice to another Macedonian regicide, hence could be thought to have his own agenda.

Wouldn't Attalus have been a more logical target than Philip? Well, reason does not always rule a person's actions, and Attalus was not then available to be killed, being away from Macedonia. There's also a crucial question of timing. A couple of ancient sources place the rape eight years before the murder, making Pausanias's revenge a very cold dish – it's hardly likely he'd had no previous opportunity. Other writers, though, including Plutarch in his *Life of Alexander*², imply the outrage was a recent one, thus explaining the choice of victim and occasion of his death.

Philip's body had hardly been removed when his senior general Antipater presented Alexander to the Macedonian army to be duly hailed and installed as their new king. A wave of executions followed. By no coincidence, the victims were inconvenient royal relatives, real or imagined threats to Alexander's position – as Gibbon unimprovably said of the pogrom of princes after Constantine the Great's death, "a precautionary massacre".

Official propaganda strove to explain his father's murder as a foreign plot, involving the new King of Persia who wanted to force a postponement if not cancellation of Philip's much-trumpeted impending attack upon his empire. There might be something in this. But it was not enough for Macedonian rumour or Plutarch³ who asserts: "When Pausanias slew Philip, most of the blame devolved upon Olympias who had added her exhortations to the young man's anger and incited him to do the deed, although a certain amount of accusation attached itself also to Alexander."

Beyond appending that Alexander had turned as deaf an ear as Philip to Pausanias's demand for Attalus's punishment – although he did quote a verse from Euripides's *Medea* ("The giver of the bride, the groom, the bride") which could have been taken to suggest a triple murder of Attalus, Philip, and Cleopatra, Plutarch does not pursue the guilt of either party. He and other biographers (Arrian and Quintus Curtius Rufus) were writing centuries after the event,⁴ hence at the mercy of their own sources, albeit they had enough independence of judgement to contradict the authority of Aristotle.



ABOVE: A mediaeval woodcut showing Olympias and the deaths of Pausanias and Cleopatra.

BELOW: Olympias on a third century Roman medal honouring Emperor Caracalla.

OFFICIAL PROPAGANDA DESCRIBED THE MURDER AS A FOREIGN PLOT

Whatever the truth, there is one indisputable and highly material fact: the three noblemen who had silenced Pausanias before he could betray anything or anyone were all close friends of Alexander.

Both Olympias and Alexander had ample cause to wish Philip permanently out of their way.

KISS OF THE ALBANIAN SPIDER WOMAN

Olympias (FT302:27) was not Macedonian but from Epirus, that savage ancient land which is now the equally ferocious Albania – its 1985 Communist National Encyclopaedia's (*Fjalori Enciklopedik Shqiptar*, p773) admiring notice credits her with complicity.

Thus she was resented at court as a barbarian outsider. Plutarch's "a jealous and sullen woman" is one of the great understatements of all time. Apart from ordering over 100 political executions, Olympias herself committed at least five murders, including roasting a royal baby and its mother alive whilst enjoying their agony – compare Albanian stories that make Nexhmije Hoxha even more cruel than dictator-husband Enver.



Not a woman to cross. But Philip had done so repeatedly, both by marrying at least four other women and by largely giving up sleeping with her. By 336, they were effectively separated, maritally and geographically: she was back in Epirus.

Her outsider status also damaged Alexander's prospects. Not regarded as a true full-blooded Macedonian, he stood to lose his position as first in line to the throne if his father's then-pregnant wife Cleopatra should produce a son: in the event it was a girl, but that's immaterial to the present story.

At the Philip-Cleopatra wedding banquet, when everyone was in their cups (normal at any macho Macedonian party), Attalus (now the King's relative) rose to propose a toast: "To a legitimate heir to the throne." An ambiguous insult, referring either to Alexander's half-foreign origin or to gossip that said Philip was not his actual father. Whatever its meaning and intent, Alexander jumped up, threw his goblet into Attalus's face shouting: "Do you dare call me a bastard?" A well-soused Philip struggled to his feet, furious with Alexander, and tried to attack him with drawn sword, only to trip and fall flat on his face. Alexander was sober enough to toss off an appropriate sarcasm: "Look at the man who plans to cross from Europe to Asia – he can't even get from couch to couch!" All this was delightfully rendered in the 1955 film with an (ironically) pre-alcoholic Richard Burton (Fredric March played Philip, Stanley Baker Attalus, Danielle Darieux Olympias).

Leaving the banquet, Alexander ensured Olympias was safe with her brother the King of Epirus before going north to campaign against some barbarian tribes. Father and son subsequently patched things up, though everyone knew it was an uneasy truce, and

one excluding Olympias. And without being Freudian about it, Alexander was distinctly a mother's boy.

Olympias swiftly placed a gold crown on the head of Pausanias's body, which had been nailed to a gibbet. Later, she had the corpse removed, cremated over Philip's ashes, and buried in a nearby grave where annually she would toast the murder. She also procured his lethal sword and dedicated it to Apollo. None of this proves she organised the assassination, only that she rejoiced in it. One ancient source, however, emphasises that she had arranged Pausanias's getaway horse. It requires no great stretch of imagination that she had likewise managed that Alexander's three intimates should be positioned close to where Philip was to die, ideally placed (cf. the similar double-cross of Bulgarian hitmen in *Casino Royale*) to spring the trap on Pausanias.

Antiquity never discovered the truth, nor shall we. No surprise – think JFK's assassination only 50 years ago. Given Pausanias's mass rape and what Aristotle says, it remains possible that he acted alone and that Olympias and Alexander simply capitalised on their good luck. But unless they acted rashly (think Thomas à Becket and the knights) – and, if so, why were they not punished? – the liquidation of Pausanias by the three friends does most to point the finger elsewhere, since Alexander (if not Olympias) would surely have wished (however hypocritically) to inflict a condign fate upon him to gratify the claims of filial piety and the army's desire for revenge.

Both mother and son had ample motive to want Philip dead, and opportunities could be created, if not found. Olympias

might be thought the driving force, though we shouldn't assume this: her flamboyant emotionalism would cover her son's more covert ruthlessness. Contrariwise, Alexander could have become aware of his mother's plotting and simply kept quiet. That way, if it came off, he would profit; if not, his back was covered. This would suit Plutarch's claim⁵ that Olympias was deemed the prime mover, with Alexander guilty more by association than actual deed.

CHOOSE YOUR POISON

Another June day, 13 years later. On the 10th, early morning, Alexander died, in his bed – not on his feet as individuals from the Roman emperor Vespasian to John Wayne have insisted is proper for a 'man' – far away from home in Babylon. He was around 32 or 33, an age not thought so young then as now, but still not old.

At the time, no suspicion of foul play. Indeed, there may have been none. Alexander had fallen ill with a high fever, possibly malarial, exacerbated by taking a cold river plunge which invited pneumonia and pleurisy and also by his long-time and now maniacal drinking – in the words of Brendan Behan, he imbibed on only two occasions: when he was thirsty and when he was not.

One source has him in his last days repeatedly toasting his company's health by draining his special 12-pint mug. A modern biographer with medical credentials, John Maxwell O'Brien,⁶ concludes that long-term alcoholic poisoning did (as with Amy Winehouse) Alexander in – as Robert Benchley (answering the question "Don't you know alcohol is a slow poison?") said, "Who's

hurrying?"

Apart from being drink-ravaged, Alexander was also enfeebled by several serious wounds incurred over years of fighting. He was also in emotional agony: his closest confidant and lover, the young Hephaestion, himself a heavy drinker, had recently died. Among many tokens of grief, Alexander ordered the execution of the deceased's physician.

Five years later – a suggestive lapse of time, but suggestive of what? – rumours of poison suddenly started up, soon hardening into accusations and belated reprisals. Olympias returns to centre stage, which may encourage or discourage belief. She had many executed for complicity, pointing the finger directly at Alexander's chief wine steward, Lollas. This proves nothing. Olympias was yet again returning from exile in Epirus and was both paying off old scores and purging the court of political enemies in her usual extravagant way. The allegation that her royal son had been murdered by poison – something the ancients regarded as peculiarly odious: the Romans had a special standing court to deal with such crimes – made a handily respectable excuse for her sanguinary actions.

Arrian, Curtius Rufus, and Plutarch themselves did not believe the poisoning story. But a few moderns have been tempted. The late great Ernst Badian nicely pointed up the conundrum: "The poisoning charge, if true, was bound to be denied or ignored, and if false, bound to be asserted."⁷

The alleged organisers of the plot were the senior general Antipater (currently back in Macedonia), his son Cassander (destined to play a prominent role in the post-Alexander civil wars) and – Aristotle ("a bugger for the bottle" – Monty Python). Yes, the 'divine' Aristotle, revered by mediæval churchmen (as Galileo would find to his cost), one of the few pagans exempted from hell-fire. In years gone by, he'd been appointed tutor to the young Alexander by Philip. But teachers have been known to hate some of their pupils, while all *FT* readers can monthly attest to the existence of one poisonous professor.

Antipater and Aristotle were close friends. Both had reason to fear and hate the king. Alexander had been purging his generals with Stalinesque enthusiasm – who knew when Antipater might be next? Aristotle was disgusted by his former pupil's rampant megalomania and blasphemous demands to be recognised as a living god. Both were horrified by his respect for, and favouring of, Orientals and their customs. So was Cassander, who got into serious trouble over this. When he first saw courtiers prostrating themselves Persian-style before their monarch, he burst out laughing. This so enraged Alexander that he banged Cassander's head against a wall.

A letter from Aristotle to Antipater may drop a broad hint that (to borrow from Mary Renault) *The King Must Die*: "Alexander may be proud to rule over many peoples, but those who hold true views of the gods have no less reason to be so."



ABOVE: Alexander the Great demonstrating his trust in his physician Philip of Acarnania by drinking a medicinal draught prepared by him despite allegations that it was a poison. Oil painting by Benjamin West, ca. 1771.



ABOVE: Alexander on his deathbed, as played by Richard Burton in the 1955 film *Alexander the Great*.

Aristotle was a doctor's son, the most renowned botanist of the day, thoroughly conversant with the best root poisons. One modern biographer makes a plausible case for strychnine⁸. In his *History of Plants*, Theophrastus (Aristotle's Lyceum colleague and successor) describes how this drug is a beneficial stimulant in small doses, fatal in large ones (cp. Warfarin). Its symptoms include lassitude and very high body temperature: both were exhibited by Alexander in his last days. Strychnine is easily extracted from its common base root, and can be kept in effective condition for a long time – long enough for a dose to be conveyed from Greece to Babylon.

One qualification, glossed over by Milns, may be needed. Plutarch's main reason for disbelief is that Alexander's corpse lay unattended for many days but never showed any physical corruption – it was common ancient belief that the bodies of poison victims swell and blacken. My own doctor says there is nothing to this, but adds that rictus and rigidity may briefly persist post-mortem. Some Roman writers⁹ get around Plutarch by saying what killed Alexander was a dose of toxic water drawn from the infamous Styx in Arcadia.

These sources show one exotic detail worthy of Ian Fleming: whatever the poison, it was conveyed in a mule's hoof, this being the only container resistant to its corrosive power. Once arrived, the fateful draught was served to Alexander by Iollas, who just happened to be the son of Antipater and younger brother of Cassander – the ideal agent. Also in on the plot was allegedly Alexander's courtier Medius, who hosted one of the king's last booze-ups, and who was infatuated with Iollas. At this particular party, Alexander was drinking pure wine, considered by the

ancients to be the sign of a hardened tippler. Theophrastus recommends that strychnine be administered in undiluted wine to mitigate its bitter taste, albeit Alexander on quaffing his 'Mickey Finn' is reported to have felt a sharp pain.

Peter Green¹⁰ believes Hephæstion was also poisoned. No ancient evidence, though he was unpopular with the Macedonian generals, above all Krateros, thus raising another possibility. Krateros had stood high in Alexander's favour, being set to replace Antipater as Viceroy, effectively Alexander's deputy. Another good reason for Antipater, if he had wind of this, to start discussing poisons with Aristotle. But the finger might point the other way. When Alexander was asked on his deathbed to whom he intended leaving his empire, he replied: "To the strongest." In Greek, *krateros* means strong, so was this a barely-veiled designation of Krateros as the successor? Despite Milns's assertion that "Krateros was a natural second-in-command, not likely to let his ambitions raise him above his station," it could be that he wanted to expedite his succession by bumping off Alexander before the fickle king should change his mind, and/or immeasurably enhance his chances in a pitched struggle against Antipater.

Olympias returns to brief play. Antipater's supporters – the old general had by now died a natural death, about the only one who did – were among the chief victims of her aforementioned court purges, until she herself was finally done in by Cassander. Despite the absence of ancient rumour, much less evidence, it is tempting to think she might have conspired with Krateros to get rid of Alexander to strengthen this general's hand for his clash with her enemy Antipater and subsequently accusing the latter of her

own crime.

From the moment of his death, Alexander's generals would engage in a bloodthirsty power struggle over the next 25 years, thus justifying his prediction: "After my death there will be some great funeral games." Whatever the truth of these speculations about Krateros, it is suggestive that when the king died he had led the veteran troops no further than Cilicia. Clearly, Krateros was waiting – but for what?

Alexander's empire pretty well died with him. The mystery of his death is very much alive. After some 50 years of lecturing and writing on Greek history, I still have. As said, it is perfectly possible that Alexander's death was a natural one: the sources' refusal to credit the poisoning gives (or should give) pause. On the other hand, there were any number of Macedonians (plus Aristotle) who had good cause to fear the drunken, paranoid megalomaniac that their king had become and who were quite capable of the only final solution: get rid of him. Motive was amply supported by means and opportunity.

Quasi-fortean finale: a contemporary clay tablet¹¹ records that on this day, "The King died. Clouds..." – portending what? **FT**

NOTES

- ¹ *Politics*, para1311a22c = bk5 ch10 in (e.g.) TJ Saunders's Penguin tr.
- ² *Alexander*, ch10 para6.
- ³ *Alexander*, ch10 paras6-7.
- ⁴ Arrian (writing in Greek, 2nd century AD) combined military and gubernatorial experience with philosophical enthusiasms. Curtius Rufus (Latin) is a shadowy figure, possibly holding high military and political office in the 1st century AD; cf. the Penguin tr. by J. Yardley and W. Heckel.
- ⁵ *Alexander*, ch10 para7.
- ⁶ *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy* (1992). Other suggestions include bowel perforation, malaria, pancreatitis, typhoid fever, and West Nile Virus; cf. DW Oldach/RE Richard/EN Borza/RM Benitez (NOT Raffa!), 'A Mysterious Death,' *New England Journal of Medicine* 338 (1998), 1764-89.
- ⁷ 'Harpalus', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 81 (1961), p36; cf. AB Bosworth, 'The Death of Alexander the Great: Rumour and Propaganda,' *Classical Quarterly* 21 (1971), pp112-26.
- ⁸ RD Milns, *Alexander the Great* (1968), pp256-8.
- ⁹ E.g. Curtius Rufus, bk10 ch17; Pliny, *Natural History*, bk30 ch53 para149.
- ¹⁰ *Alexander of Macedon* (1974), p477.
- ¹¹ Abraham Sacks & Hermann Hunger, *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylon* (1988), vol. 1, p207.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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THE TAKING OF DR MOORE



As he embarks upon a comprehensive survey of historical claims for levitation and other forms of supernatural transportation, **BOB RICKARD** will be posting occasional bulletins in FT on some interesting cases, such as this fairy abduction from 17th century Ireland.

This first instalment concerns a narrative, published towards the end of 1678, relating the abduction of Dr Moore by fairies in County Wicklow, Ireland. Today, garbled and abbreviated versions of this amazing story can be found on the Internet, and if a source is given at all it is usually inadequate. It certainly deserves a better treatment because it is a very special

account indeed. Not only does it have intrinsic value as an historical document,¹ it contains many elements that are central to my current research, including:

- A levitation that develops into a teleportation witnessed by at least two other people and at close quarters.
- An Irish version of the 'Wild Ride' as Dr Moore is 'taken' by a 'fairy host' to remote

places – including an 'ancient ruin' – where there is feasting, dancing and music. At the time of this story, the witch persecutions had been under way throughout Europe for several centuries, including in Ireland. The significance of the lack of association here with the Sabbat visits and feasts of witches elsewhere enhances this narrative's purity.

- The abductee has a history of such 'disappearances' since childhood.

ORE...AND HIS RETURN



- A 'Wise Woman' who uses a form of 'clairvoyance' or 'remote viewing' to locate Dr Moore, a form of 'telekinetic action' to protect him, and *predicts* his 'return'.

- An association of the fairies with disease as a punishment for offences against them.

- The abductee returns and verifies the Wise Woman's account.

- Although other examples of these phenomena are to be found among Irish folktales, this narrative asserts that it happened to *real people* in a contemporary landscape.

THE BROADSHEET

My first encounter with Dr Moore's fairy abduction was in 1976, when John Michell and I were researching our *Phenomena: A Book of Wonders* (1977). John, who was a Shakespearean scholar, had noted that this story had been mentioned by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips (1820–1889), an antiquarian and collector of Shakespearean works and related documents, in his *Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology* (1845).² Unfortunately for us, Halliwell shed no helpful light on the original broadsheet, which he claimed to have read in the British Library (BL).

Initially, my search for the broadsheet in the BL was frustrated; nor could I find

any evidence that Halliwell might have obtained his own copy. Sometime later, I found a copy in the Australian National Library. It is listed in the *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of the English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641-1700*, compiled by the Yale librarian Donald Wing between 1945 and 1951 and now incorporated into the British Library's huge *English Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC). Here is how this 'short' title appears in the ESTC:

Strange and Wonderful News from the County of Wicklow in Ireland, or a Full and True Relation of what Happened to one Dr Moore, (Late Schoolmaster in London.) How

THE DOCTOR VANISHES

Perhaps the dispute with a friend unsettled the Doctor. Perhaps being back in the landscape of his childhood and reminiscing about being ‘taken’ put into him some kind of reverie; after all, traditional tales of those taken by fairies often say that an experience of the Otherworld (whatever it may be) never really leaves a person. A noticeable change came over the Doctor; he stood up and announced to the others that “he must leave their Company, *for he was called away*.”⁸ Richard Uniack noticed that Dr Moore was actually rising upwards off the ground. Reaching forwards, Uniack “catches fast hold of his arm with one hand, and *intwined* his arm within the Doctor’s arm, and with his other hand grasped the Doctor’s shoulder.” On the other side of the Doctor, Laughlin Moore quickly held onto the figure in the air; but, says the broadsheet, “the Doctor *maugre* [despite] their strength was lifted off the ground”. Laughlin’s fear got the better of him, causing him to let go; but “Uniack continued his hold, and was carried above a yard from the ground.” Then, “by some extraordinary unperceived force”, he too was compelled to let go.

In this narrative we find the account of the witnesses and, later, what Dr Moore himself experienced. All the two witnesses could understand was that “the Doctor was hurried immediately out of the Room, but whether conveyed through the window, or out at the door, they being so affrighted none of them could declare.” As quickly as it began, the phenomenon was over.

Viewed dispassionately, the testimony is too circumstantial to serve as evidence that the Doctor actually levitated and was teleported to distant spots; only that so it was believed and attributed to the fairies. It seems understandable that, given the sudden onset of an event that defies our normal expectations of everyday reality, what happened next could not be adequately

described or accounted for. Would any of us have reacted any differently?

ENTER THE WISE WOMAN

Finding themselves suddenly alone, Uniack and Loughlin Moore, are stunned by what has just happened. The narrative describes them (almost in modern phrasing) as “Being greatly surprised at the strangeness of the accident”. They don’t know what else to do except call for the innkeeper and explain as best they can the strange fate of their companion.

To their additional astonishment, the innkeeper “seems not to be much terrified thereat, as if such disasters were common thereabouts”. He tells them that “within a quarter of a mile” lives a woman “who by the Neighbourhood was called a Wise-woman” who “did usually give Intelligence of things that had been lost, and of Cattle that were gone astray” (see the ‘Fairy Doctor’ panel over the page), adding that he had no doubt that “if the Woman were sent for, she could resolve them where their Friend was, and by what means conveyed away”. Concerned for the safety of Dr Moore, they immediately sent someone to bring her.

On the Wise Woman’s arrival, Uniack seeks an assurance from her whether, indeed, she can “give them any account” of the gentleman “that had been Spirited out of their Company about an hour before”. Without fuss, recourse to ritual or preamble, the Old Woman reassures them. Dr Moore, she says, is at this moment “in a Wood about a mile distant, preparing to take Horse; that in one hand he had a Glass of Wine, in the other a piece of Bread; that he was very much courted to eat and drink”. If he succumbed to temptation, she warns, the Doctor would never be “free from a Consumption”,⁹ and will “pine away to death”. Richard Uniack gives the Old Woman “a Cobb”¹⁰ and urges her to protect him somehow.

She answers that she will see to it that

Dr Moore neither eats nor drinks with his abductors.¹¹ With that, she “struck down her hand,” as if snatching at something. Next, she begins a chant in Irish, which the company takes to be “a Spell or Charm”.¹² We are told the substance of this *pishogue*: “First she runs his Pedigree back four generations, and calls his Ancestors by their several Names;¹³ then summons him from the East, the West, the North, and the South, from Troops and Regiments, especially from the Govenour mounted on the Sorrel Horse, etc.”¹⁴

After repeating ‘the Charm’ several times, the Old Woman proceeded to predict that the Doctor would be carried to several other places that night. From the Wood (a mile distant from the Inn), he would be taken about seven miles to “a Danes Fort”¹⁵ where he would be surrounded by “great Revelling and Dancing, together with variety of Meats and Liquors”. That said, the Old Woman repeated her promise to protect him.

Next, the Doctor was to be transported “twenty miles farther”, where again the Host would stop for “great Merriment”. The final destination of his ‘Wild Ride’ was to be Seven Churches, some 16 miles east-northeast of Baltinglass, a religious community in the heart of the Wicklow Hills, also known as Glendalough.¹⁶ Finally, the Old Woman said that “towards Day-break” the Doctor would be reunited with his friends, returned safely without any harm done to him. With that she said no more and departed from the Inn.

It is important to remember that the Old Woman is relaying all this at a time between one and two hours after the Doctor’s disappearance. Dawn is a long way off, and therefore she is giving a prediction. As we, at this remove, have no idea where the old ‘Fort’ and other places mentioned are in relation to Baltinglass, we can only deduce that, if it was a linear procession with no double-backing, the round trip to Glendalough and back would be in the region of 30 miles.¹⁷



JOE KING / CREATIVE COMMONS

THE FAIRY DOCTORS OF IRELAND

Irish folklore contains accounts of men and women who mediated between the common folk and the supernatural fairy realm – but were they wily charlatans or descendants of ancient Celtic shamans?



This rare illustration of a consultation with a Fairy Doctor¹ paints a fairly disparaging portrait of the peasant healers of rural Ireland. They were men – or women – who made a living treating both mental and physical illnesses (with herbs and spells), healing sick animals, finding lost items, lifting curses, recovering ‘changelings’ and so on. The general view among the early folklorists and academicians – from the Irish antiquarian Thomas Crofton Croker (1798-1854) in his *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, (1825) to the archaeologist WG Wood-Martin (1847-1917) in his *Traces of the Elder Faiths of Ireland* (1902) – was that they were wily rogues, exploiting the ignorance of common folk by claiming to have a special relationship with the otherworldly and unpredictable ‘Good Neighbours’, and whose bogus rituals – called by Rev. John O’Hanlon “mysterious quackery”² – were full of dubious Gaelic and cod Latin, and fuelled by frequent, generous swigs of *poteen*.³

It was only a later generation of scholars – typified by WB Yeats (1865-1939) – who saw in these often solitary and dirt-poor hermits more than mere mendacity. Their playful brogue and colourful language were firmly in the Gaelic oral tradition, promulgating, in their own untutored way, the mysticism and lore of ancient but fading Celtic traditions.

Hidden in the body of so many of these collections of tales are hints of this – perhaps more truly *sheoguey*⁴ – type of Fairy Doctor.

Lady Wilde (1821-1896), for example, found that “fairy doctors are generally females” yet describes a “fairy-man” from Innis Sark: “He never touched beer, spirits or meat in all his life but has lived entirely on bread, fruit and vegetables... He stands quite apart from life and by this means hold his power over the mysteries.”⁵ Yeats cites from Croker an interview with the Fairy Doctor Tom Bourke, telling how Bourke got his ‘gift’ of association with the Good Folk and the terrible cost of it: three of Bourke’s children died young, a fate which faced his fourth, until by acknowledging the ‘gift’ he saved the boy’s life. Bourke also told of warring groups among the Fairies, and allegiances between Fairy factions and human families over generations.⁶

Yeats himself made a few interesting notes upon the Fairy Doctors that he had heard of or come across during his own researches, saying that their “temperament” was born with them and distinguished them from witches. Their power came directly from the fairies, he wrote, unlike witches who received theirs from “evil spirits and [their] own malignant will”; and also, while witches are “feared”, the Fairy Doctor

“is gone to for advice, and is never worse than mischievous”.

Modern scholars – such as Eva Pócs, Gustav Henningsen, Wolfgang Behringer, Carlo Ginsburg and Emma Wilby – have drawn special attention to these inherently shamanistic figures and the role they have played in rural communities throughout European history. Pócs defines them as “charismatic healers who maintained a ritual connection with the supernatural fairy world”.⁷ As mediators between the living and the fairy world, they pre-date the witchcraft notions of both the European ecclesiastical ‘elite’ and the peasantry, yet were inevitably caught up in the terrible anti-witch pogroms. Whether they are the descendants of some prehistoric European shamanism is currently in debate. Admittedly, theirs was a socially peripheral practice where Asian shamanism proper originates in a cult that is central to a society.

As a folk motif, the ‘abduction’ itself is a variation upon shamanistic initiation, and a lengthy absence, while frequently mentioned in British and Irish fairylore, is often attributed to the differential passage of time in the Fairy realm equating to the ‘blink of an eye’ in the human world (or *vice versa*).⁸ Yeats concluded that “the most celebrated Fairy Doctors are sometimes people the fairies loved and carried away... not that

those the fairies love are always carried off – they may merely grow silent and strange, and take to lonely wanderings in the ‘gentle’ places. Such will,” he adds, “in after-times, be great poets or musicians, or fairy doctors.” Probably the most famous Fairy Doctor in modern times was Biddy Early (c.1798-1874) who “was away seven years. She didn’t tell me about it but she spoke of it to others”.⁹

Given the history of our Dr Moore – ‘taken’ many times since childhood, and again as soon as he returns to his homeland – we might presume that he was a latent Fairy Doctor himself, retaining his sensitivity to the *sheoguey* world throughout his life.

NOTES

1 Engraving by Edmund Fitzpatrick for the *Illustrated London News* (31 Dec 1859).

2 Re. “a noted Sheogue Doctor called ‘Paddy the Dash’”, Rev. John O’Hanlon, *Irish folklore: traditions and superstitions of the country, with humorous tales* (1870), p51.

3 Undoubtedly many were tricksters, always with an eye open for an advantageous opportunity. On 19th century Fairy Doctors see Simon Young, ‘Fairy impostors in County Longford in the Great Famine’, https://www.academia.edu/7570741/Young_Fairy_Impostors_in_the_Great_Famine.

4 *Sheoguey* – This evocative Gaelic adjective, which we might translate as ‘to do with all things fairy’, deriving from *sheogue* meaning fairy, appears in many of the collected Irish tales but not in modern dictionaries (not even in the Oxford English Dictionary).

5 Lady Francesca Speranza Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* (1887).

6 WB Yeats, *Fairy and Folktales of Ireland* (1888). My citations come from Yeats’s main notes on Fairy Doctors that fall within pages 133-177, but they feature in many stories throughout this volume.

7 Eva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead* (1999), pp14f.

8 See ‘The Supernatural Lapse of Time in Fairyland’, chapter VII of *The Science of Fairy Tales* by Edwin Sidney Hartland (1891).

9 Some said Biddy got the knowledge from her son, who was once ‘taken’. “After his death always lamenting for him she was, till he came back, and gave her the gift of curing.” See the narratives collected by Lady Augusta Gregory, ‘Seers and Healers’ in her *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920).

THE RETURN OF DR MOORE

As predicted, at about six o' clock the next morning, Dr Moore was found knocking at the door. Once inside, he asked for food and drink "for he was both hungry and thirsty, having been hurried from place to place all that Night". Once refreshed and composed he satisfied the clamour for an account of what happened to him:

"That it seemed to him there came into the Room about 20 men, some mounted on Horseback, others on foot, and laid hold on him; That he was sensible of Mr Uniack's and Mr Moore's endeavours to have kept him, and of the force they used; but it was all to no purpose, for had there been 40 more they would have signified nothing."

"That from the House he was carried to a Wood, about a mile distant, where was a fine Horse prepared, and as he was about to mount, a Glass of Wine was given him, and a crust of Bread; but when he offered to eat and drink, they were both struck out of his hand."

"That from thence he went in the same Company that had taken him away, to a Danes Fort about seven miles from the Wood; That he imagined himself to be mounted on a white Horse, whose motion was exceeding swift, and when they came to the Fort, their Company multiplied to about 300 large and well-proportioned Men and Women: He who seemed to be Chief, was mounted on a sorrel Horse; that they all dismounted and fell to dancing, and that it came to the Doctor's turn to lead a Dance, which he did remember the Tune he danced unto."

"That after the dancing, there appeared a

most sumptuous Banquet, and the Governour took him by the hand and desired him to eat; which he several times attempted, but was prevented by something that still struck the Meat out of his hand: And so gives an account how from thence he was carried to the several places the Old Woman had mentioned the Night before; and that about break of day he found himself alone within sight of the Inn."

Shortly afterwards, Richard Uniack rode with the Doctor and saw for himself the Danes Fort. Here, they found "the Grass so trodden down, and the Ground beaten, as 500 men had been there". They then pushed onward, tracing the path the Doctor had travelled the night before "so exactly, that if his Horse went but a yard out of the track, he would presently turn him into it again". The narrative of Dr Moore ends there.

A TOUCH OF AUTHENTICITY?

About a month later – on 18 November 1678 – we find Richard Uniack, in the presence of Dr Moore himself, relating the adventure to a Dr Murphey and (more importantly) to Stephen Ludlow.¹⁸ This meeting, I presume, was in Dublin where Ludlow worked as one of the Six Clerks of the High Court of Chancery. If Ludlow asked any questions afterwards, or sought any verification, we are not told.

No doubt, so-called 'practical' and 'scientific' men would have us believe that anyone retailing a fairy story is either mad, drunk or perpetrating a fraud, but if our principal participant and his chief witness were fabricating the story for some reason, would they really be so foolish as to try to

hoodwink a member of one of the senior law benches in the land? From the circumstances and fantastic nature of this account that seems to me unlikely, and the risk they took in the telling of it may well be a mark of their sincerity.

In just under two months from the original abduction in Wicklow, the story reached London. The final paragraph of the broadsheet identifies a secondary narrator – John Cother, in London – who declares that he is printing this broadsheet on behalf of a friend "T.R.". Cother says that the story was being "much spoken of" in Dublin "as True News" and the account was sent to him (Cother) from Dublin "by a person whom I credit" and comes "recommended" in a letter bearing date 23 November 1678 – i.e. just five days after Uniack told Stephen Ludlow. However, this 'reliable' person is not identified.¹⁹

A final, important point needs to be considered when judging the value of this narrative. The great Gaelic scholar and poet Douglas Hyde (1938-1945) told the American anthropologist Walter Evans-Wentz (1878-1965) that, when listening to rural folktales, there was a significant difference between those that were 'raw' and based on personal belief or experience and those that were the product of a storyteller's art, the latter being more intricate and structured.²⁰ While endless retelling over time can massage the former into the latter, this did not have sufficient time to have happened here. We can still distinguish the signatures of the two primary voices (those of Dr Moore and



ABOVE: This painting by Joseph Peacock (1783-1837), called *The Patron, or The Festival of St Kevin at the Seven Churches, Glendalough* (1813), hints at the extraordinary tradition of non-religious gatherings held there, called 'patterns' or 'patrons'. These ancient annual fairs were all about dancing, drinking and trading and perhaps just the sort of revelry that the fairy hosts both instituted and enjoyed wherever they stopped at ancient sites, raths and ruins of old forts. Little wonder, then, that Dr Moore's abductors were heading there from Baltinglass by the aerial route over the intervening mountains.

Richard Uniack). With the narrative of Dr Moore's adventure we have a tale that seems to have the elements of both categories and yet what little we hear from Dr Moore himself seems authentically 'raw' when compared to the structured 'whole' (or latter part) which could be a product of Uniack's retelling.

Should we accept this as evidence of actual teleportation and levitation? The narrative seems consistent with the way an authentic and baffling personal experience would be explained within a belief in fairies. So, while its context may be unacceptable to

rationalists, I would not dismiss it completely. That said, several scholars have noted the similarity of Dr Moore's adventure to the levitations of a butler in the employ of Lord Orrery, also in the 17th century. As this took place in the presence of a larger number of witnesses I would like to compare the two cases in my next article. [FT](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincerest thanks to the late John Michell for the original impetus; to Mike Dash for the genealogy of

Stephen Ludlow; to Peter Costello for advice and to Simon Young for many instances of advice and information (the mistakes are down to me).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



BOB RICKARD started *Fortean Times* in 1973 and was its co-editor for 30 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles on forteana and a founder of the Charles Fort Institute.

NOTES

1 As FT's resident scholar of fairylore, Dr Simon Young, expressed to me: "The [fairy beliefs of Ireland and Britain] began to be written down just as they were dying in the 19th century. Anything prior to the 19th century is rare. Anything prior to the 18th century is gold dust. This source offers so many firsts." Pers. comm, 11 July 2013.

2 In fact, Halliwell reprinted the full text of this narrative twice. Firstly, it appears in *The Archaeologist and Journal of Antiquarian Science*, vol 4 (1842), pp170-174, of which he was the editor, with the comment: "The following curious relation is printed entire from a copy of the pamphlet in the British Museum. It is a very interesting document in the history of Fairy Mythology." It must have appealed to his curiosity because he repeated it, in full, in his *Illustrations Of The Fairy Mythology Of A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1845) pp292-296, under the heading 'The Irish Fairies'.

3 English Short Title Catalogue – Wing C6380 – Wing 2 S5869A - <http://estc.bl.uk/R20925>

4 I arrive at this moment working back from the date of the meeting between Dr Moore and Stephen Ludlow, a high-ranking lawyer (see note 19) on 18 Nov 1678, at which the account was given, but not as an official deposition. The narrator, begins "about three weeks since..." which places the event in the latter half of October 1678.

5 Today's Baltinglass (anciently given as Baltinglas or Ballinglas) is situated on the River Slaney and from it the N81 heads northwards to Dublin. Its now-ruined abbey was founded in 1148, and Bronze Age burials and megaliths in the vicinity

date back 5,000 years.

A more famous 'flyer' in this region was Lady Alice Kyteler (c.1263-c.1325), the subject of Ireland's first witch trial in Kilkenny (barely 50 miles south-west of Baltinglass), who fled Ireland during the proceedings in 1324. It was widely believed that "on more than one occasion she anointed a coultter [obsolete English: the blade of a ploughshare] and performed long aerial journeys on it". See, Wood-Martin *Traces of the Elder Faiths*, p174.

6 Dromgreagh, an uncertain translation from Gaelic – *droim-gráig* – simply refers to a farmstead on a ridge or small hill. Such places were many and few survived the centuries. We don't know on which side of Baltinglass this country inn might have been, and so we can't deduce the direction in which our party was travelling. The narrative speaks of Dr Moore "going down to view his concerns there", so we might suppose they were coming 'down' from Dublin, approximately 50 miles to the north-east; or perhaps 'down' simply implied a general transition from town to country.

7 'Neighbour' – The original text uses a capital 'N', very likely as a traditional deference to the fairies. Given her profession, which was undoubtedly that of a 'Fairy Doctor', it is possible that local folk considered her to be a kind of fairy herself. See the panel on 'Fairy Doctors'.

8 "called away" (my emphasis) – time and again we hear, in stories from many different cultures, about the local fairies ability to "call" to certain sensitive people. Sometimes the prelude to this compulsion to join them is hearing a distinctive 'tinkling' sound, eerie laughter or singing, or 'fairy music'.

9 Consumption – There was a common belief that anyone wasting away from tuberculosis was being compelled to dance or play a fiddle nonstop through the night, being ejected from the fairy ring at daybreak. Consumption was similarly interpreted as the distinctive sickness of a 'changeling'; see the 1895 case of Bridget Cleary (Angela Bourke *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story*, 2006, pp32-3). Relative to the story of Dr Moore, Simon Young told me: "The idea that the fairies can cause consumption is something I can't source before about 1850... and yet here it is in the late 17th century." Pers comm, 11 July 2013.

10 'Cobbs', generally, were primitive coins made of roughly cut discs, often missing much of the lettering and design of die-struck coins.

11 The prohibition against consuming food and drink in the Otherworld, especially if it is offered, appears in folktales of different cultures, often warning of a severe or fatal penalty for doing so. Given the close correlation between the fairies and the dead there is no easy way for those who were thus suborned to return. They are doomed to stay in fairyland and suffer wasting sicknesses or die from a rapid onset of old age if they return to human lands. See Simon Young, 'Irish Fairies and Irish Food' (winsham.blogspot.it/2015/12/irishfairies-and-irish-food-mary.html).

12 *Pishogue* – spoken spells or charms were the stock in trade of Fairy Doctors. This could be one of the earliest descriptions of the 'formula' of a *pishogue*.

13 This is a significant moment. It is not said whether the Wise Woman asked for this information, was told it, or simply knew

it. By reciting the Doctor's genealogy "back four generations" we might assume she already knew the Doctor's family. It is often said of Fairy Doctors that they just 'know' things. Perhaps Dr Moore's family were well known (at least to the Fairy Doctors) in those parts? Or, stranger still, could this be the *same* Wise Woman to whom the Doctor's mother had recourse when he was 'taken' as a child... even though that was 34 or more years earlier?

14 The Irish fairies – especially their 'Troops' or 'Hosts' (*sluagh*) – are traditionally described in military terms. She also 'sees' their leader and his distinctive horse. The 'Trooping Fairies' were said to be more like humans in size, whereas the more spiteful 'Solitary Fairies' were quite small. See WB Yeats, 'Classification of Irish Fairies', in *Fairy and Folktales of Ireland* (1888), pp383-387. I am using the Colin Smythe 1973 edition, with an introduction by Kathleen Raine for my Yeats citations.

15 'Danes Forts', 'raths', 'lisses' and 'forths' are widely assumed to be ancient ruins, but can also refer to solitary mounds or small hills reputed to contain a 'door' into fairyland or a place where the fairies hold their revels. See 'Forths and Sheoguey Places' in Lady Augusta Gregory, *Visions and Beliefs in the West of Ireland* (1920), pp255-273. For 'sheoguey' see note 23. An ancient belief holds that the green mounds became the refuge of the people of the Goddess Danu (*Tuatha de Danann*) after they were defeated by the Milesians (the first human settlers), thereby becoming the *Sidhe*, the original fairies.

16 Seven Churches is an old name for an eerily

beautiful district within the Wicklow Hills, also known as Glendalough (valley of the two lochs), founded in the sixth century as a Christian monastic settlement by St Kevin. Many of the buildings standing today date from the 10th to 12th centuries despite the best efforts of the Vikings, Normans and the English.

17 The distance given that Dr Moore travelled from the Inn was: one mile to a wood, then seven miles to a 'fort', another distance of 20 miles, then seven miles to Seven Churches; and back again. We have no way of knowing whether this was in a straight line.

18 Stephen Ludlow was a Member of Parliament, elected to sit in the Irish House of Commons for Boyle and later for Newtownlimavady. He was one of the Six Clerks in the High Court of Chancery in Ireland, in Dublin, serving until his death in 1721. His paternal uncle was Edmund Ludlow, a famous cavalry general and parliamentarian in Cromwell's Commonwealth, and one of the regicides of Charles I. His grandson Peter Ludlow was created a Baron in 1755, and Earl Ludlow 1760. Peerage of Ireland and *Parliamentary Memoirs of Fermanagh and Tyrone, from 1613 to 1885*, by Earl of Belmore, Dublin (1887), pp244-245.

19 A better identification of the people and places mentioned is part of my ongoing research into this fascinating story of teleportation and levitation. Any further help welcomed.

20 See Hyde's introduction to Section 1, Chapter 2, 'The Taking of Evidence' (p.23) in WY Evans-Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911).

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MEET THE MAN OF TOMORROW

SD TUCKER explores the strange world of the next President of the United States, Andrew D Basiago, a man whose upcoming election really is a dead-cert - it has to be, as it has already happened...

HE IS THE EGG-MAN

The poor, it is said, are always with us - but one far-sighted man disagrees: namely Andrew D Basiago, an independent candidate¹ who ran for US President against both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton last year upon a radical new platform of solving global poverty by making foreigners eat eggs. Basiago produced a comprehensive manifesto for his recent tilt at the White House, hatching a 100-point plan for the American nation; point 99 was to promise to spend much of his time in office "promoting [global] egg-consumption as a development tool". "The goal," Basiago has written, "should be one egg per person, per day." Eating eggs, claims Basiago, somehow transforms people into better readers, and better readers become more educated, thus opening the way towards such admirable eggheads gaining better jobs. According to Basiago, "National literacy rates are directly correlated with national rates of daily per capita egg-consumption" - something which may well be true, but does suggest that, no matter how high Basiago's own reading-age, he has yet to come across the statement 'correlation does not necessarily imply causation' written down anywhere. Given that (see pledge 27), Basiago also promises to end all foreign aid handouts on the (not entirely unconvincing) grounds that "foreign aid is a scam in which poor people in rich countries give money to rich people in poor countries", the teeming masses of the developing world would quickly find they had no other option than to go to work on an egg in the brave new world of President Basiago.²

BROKEN WORD

If you have a 100-point manifesto, then you are bound to end up with a fair bit of filler-material. Rarely, however, can a Presidential candidate's B-list of policy-proposals have been quite so desperate as those of Mr Basiago. The prime example was his policy pledge 92, which committed



LEFT: Andrew D Basiago: likes eggs, hates Word 2007 and is familiar with Sasquatch.

**"THE GOAL,"
WRITES BASIAGO,
"SHOULD BE ONE
EGG PER PERSON,
PER DAY"**

the US Government to finding out "why Microsoft, after perfecting Word in its 2003 version, substituted it with a far inferior version in Word 2007". Could a conspiracy have been afoot? "Is there a plot to make computer use in the US slower, less functional, more cumbersome, less efficient, more time-consuming, less productive, and more aggravating? That is what we have seen!" Who would have thought anyone would end up missing Clippy the talking

paperclip so much? Policy pledge 28, meanwhile, made Andrew D Basiago sound more like General Jack D Ripper from *Dr Strangelove* - he wanted to ban fluoride from the US water-supply on the twin grounds that "The Nazis used it to sedate prisoners in the concentration-camps" and because "its effects include calcifying the pineal gland, thereby blocking the 'third eye', which is believed to be the source of human intuition". Basiago doubtless used his own non-calcified powers of intuition to create pledge 16, in which he promised to place Sasquatch and Bigfoot on the endangered species list. Because "I am the first US Presidential candidate since Theodore Roosevelt to declare publicly that I have encountered Sasquatch",³ Basiago knows for sure that the mysterious beasts exist. He saw a young one and his hairy brown dad whilst camping in the Adirondacks as a small child in August 1966, he says, and claims to have worked out that their matrilineal DNA is human and their patrilineal DNA derived from some utterly unknown primate. Maybe this unknown sperm-donor was actually an alien? Basiago doesn't specifically say so, but he himself claims to have spotted several strange hominids living on Mars, so this would seem to be a reasonable possibility. In a long 2015 radio interview, Basiago christened these Martian cryptids *Homo martis sasquatchis*, and talked about having examined a NASA Rover photo of one sitting down on a Martian hillside.⁴

If you are surprised by the news that Bigfoot is present on Mars, then this is because the US Government have been covering up their secret knowledge about the true nature of the Universe for decades now, something which led Basiago to make his 15th pledge, that of "resolving basic cosmological mysteries". As soon as he achieves power, Basiago proposes declaring a new International Geophysical Year⁵ to



NASA

crack, once and for all, such conundrums as: “whether the Earth is round or flat; whether the Earth is solid or hollow; whether NASA landed men on the moon or hoaxed the lunar landings; and whether the cosmos is natural and organic or artificial and holographic”. If the wonks on Capitol Hill think that the American public made a left-field choice in President Trump, they should consider just how non-mainstream a leader they’re going to end up with next time around. Basiago has already begun his campaign for Election 2020 – it is exactly the same as his campaign for Election 2016, seeing as he deals only in eternal truths – and, being a self-confessed time-traveller with knowledge of future events, he seems confident of winning.

ONE SMALL STEP FOR BIGFOOT

Basiago is an educated man, a lawyer with five degrees, including a Masters from Cambridge, and a background in environmental law, journalism and planning; who can ever know how many eggs he has had to eat to get where he is today? Certainly, he was an “avid” reader of that well-known printed form of brain-food, *National Geographic* magazine, to whose then-President John Fahey he wrote an intriguing letter in 2008, which first brought him to public attention. “Dear Mr Fahey,” his missive read, “I am writing to inform the National Geographic Society that I have discovered life on Mars and to invite your great organisation to publish my findings.” These findings were included in an attached 41-page White Paper, *The Discovery of Life on Mars*, whose prefatory abstract contained a chilling declaration that it contained some “frightening content”.⁶ It certainly did ...

The story began in January 2008, when a detail from a panoramic photograph taken by NASA’s *Spirit* rover of the Martian landscape went viral due to the presence of a small rock that happened to look a lot like a humanoid figure. The remarkable thing was that the simulacrum’s appearance and pose were (as *FT* reported at the time: see FT233:5) “strangely reminiscent of the notorious Patterson-Gimlin Bigfoot freeze-frame”, leading some to dub the thing ‘Bigfoot on Mars’. However, subsequent analysis of the image, given the official reference PIA10214 by NASA, showed that it



BELOW: Image PIA10214, a panoramic photo of the Martian surface taken by NASA’s *Spirit* rover.

BELOW: The Bigfoot simulacrum that went viral online; Basiago identified it as being a statue possibly honouring the Martian dead or an actual dead Martian who had been caught up in an “apocalyptic event”.

had been blown up and cropped drastically, with ‘Smallfoot’ being really no more than 6cm tall. Worse, the way *Spirit*’s camera worked meant that it took three broad 180° panoramic scans of the Martian landscape, each using a different colour-filter, and then spliced all three together later to produce the full-colour image released to the public. If this really was some kind of living creature, then it must have stayed perfectly still, as if frozen in time, between the camera’s separate fly-pasts.⁷ Naturally when Andrew D Basiago, having five degrees and an IQ of 168, saw the ‘Bigfoot’ image for himself, he did not fall into the foolish trap of claiming that this was a living creature; instead, he identified it as being a small statue of some kind, probably showing a robed female alien, and possibly honouring the Martian dead from some past planet-wide catastrophe like those mentioned in the books of Graham Hancock. Alternatively, maybe the figure was a real Martian, but she had been caught up in an “apocalyptic event” like a giant mudslide, and been fossilised mid-stride.

CREATURES OF THE STONE AGE

Further examination of Image PIA10214 as a whole revealed a series of other figures on Mars, which Basiago admitted “look like rocks”, presumably because they are. However, he had downloaded the photo in question and imported it into Microsoft

Paint on his “HP Pavilion Entertainment Laptop Personal Computer”, before cutting-and-copying small sections of the panorama, which he then pasted into Microsoft Word 2003 (NOT the 2007 edition!!!). These snippets were then enlarged at 500 per cent resolution and stretched out to fit the text-margins onscreen. The end result was a blurry mess which could have showed just about anything – but which, to Basiago’s eyes, provided evidence of an entire Martian menagerie, an alien zoo full of hybrid freaks to shock even Dr Moreau. Amongst other bizarre fauna, Basiago describes living, semi-transparent totem-poles with multiple “asymmetric” arms and “a childish grin” on their faces, a species of “glassine mantises”, scorpion-men and caterpillar-women, penguins, bulbous-headed, meditating humanoids adopting the Lotus-position, an elephant sitting at a table, cows, horses, an octopus with the face of a lion, a toddler with the lower body of a lizard, and even “an astronaut buried in the sands of Mars that time forgot”. Some other animals were given tentative taxonomic names, such as ‘The Woofy’ (a tumbleweed with the head of a dog), ‘The Gumby Lizard’ (a breed of flat reptile), ‘The Spying Giraffe’ (with “red lips, a patch of blue beneath its bulging eyes, and a crest atop its head like some dinosaurs”), ‘Triangle-Face the Rock-Animal’ (whose morphology is surely self-explanatory), and ‘The Wrench-Bird’ (which “has the look of

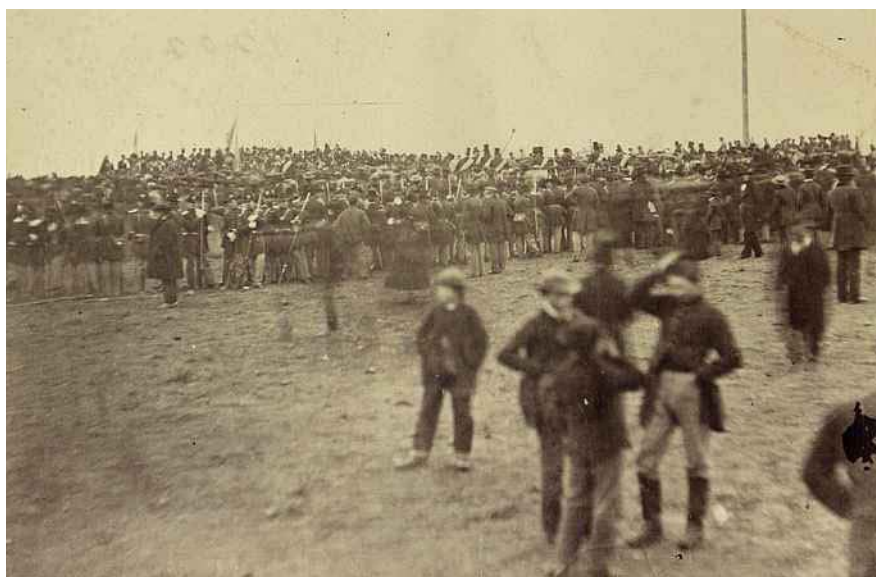


ABOVE: Past and future US Presidents, sent to the Red Planet by the CIA. BELOW: One of the 'plesiosaurs' that Basiago claims roam the surface of Mars... along with the 'woofy', the 'gummy lizard' and a giant Mr Potato Head.

a wrench that has been left too long in the rain"). Some of these things may even have been "spiritual beings" which had only agreed to appear on camera "because of the inter-dimensional significance" of NASA's photo.

Perhaps anticipating the objection that the images were time-stretched composites, Basiago's paper is full of uncertainty over whether the 'animals' he has discovered are really living creatures at all, or merely artificial constructs. For example, one category of "exophenotype" (alien creature) identified by the future leader of the Free World was, he said, "for want of a better description, all head." "Imagine the head of a clown in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade that has broken loose from its body," says Basiago, and you will have some idea of what these beings look like. However, due to their colossal size, he admits that they might actually be giant head-shaped *buildings*, not living things at all. For example, he has spotted two vast objects which he thinks look like Mr Potato-Head and the bald pate of the Dr Evil character from the *Austin Powers* films, both of which life-forms he deems unlikely to have evolved on other planets, especially as disembodied cephalic giants. Another "mirthful egg-shaped face surrounded by tubules", meanwhile, he identifies as being a potential Humpty-Dumpty-like roller-coaster ride of some sort, though this is only one of "a universe of possibilities." Basiago has christened another region of Mars that is full of such possibilities 'The Debris Field', which he says is full of thousands of dead humanoid Martians, although he admits to the untrained eye it may simply resemble "a vast, light-brown, pebbled moraine". Did these Martians die in a giant flood? Were they killed by snakes? Or are they not dead bodies at all, but "fungal primates", which grow in the ground "like mushrooms do on Earth"? Possibly they are all part of one gigantic underground animal, which possesses a "unitary mind"? Or, then again,

HE HAS SPOTTED TWO VAST OBJECTS WHICH HE THINKS LOOK LIKE MR POTATO-HEAD



ABOVE: The young Basiago (centre) sent back in time to 1863 to witness Lincoln's historic Gettysburg Address. He lost his shoes during the time-jump, but was given some new, if rather large, ones by a friendly cobbler.

maybe not, as one of the Martians appears to be wearing "a white shirt and blue pants", suggesting some level of individual consciousness. Perhaps instead they are "thousands of corpses fructifying in a sticky paste", covered by some "immobilising substance" sprayed out onto them by reptilian predators? Or maybe they are just some pebbles? Until Basiago comes to power and (see pledge 11) reveals the suppressed truth about the secrets of Mars, we shall never know.

Especially intriguing are Basiago's speculations about the numerous plesiosaurs which he says roam Mars. Some of PIA10214's rocks, when viewed in blurry enlarged form, appear to have long necks which resemble profile shots of Nessie peeping her head out over the waves of her Loch, as in the famous 'Surgeon's Photo' of 1934, or former *FT*-columnist Doc Shiels's equally striking image of 1977. Basiago's conclusion is that on Mars plesiosaurs have evolved to have large shells like turtles, some of which mimic stones, for purposes of camouflage. However, as well as possessing shells, these creatures are land-based and must have (concealed?) legs rather than flippers if they are to move, so one has to question in what sense they are really plesiosaurs. Again, Basiago anticipates this objection by speculating that "some of the plesiosaurs might not be reptiles at all, but rather a species of fowl with round, grey bodies that make them look like boulders and that have earned for them the name 'Rock Roosters'." Like a typical politician, he has an answer for everything ...

TOMORROW'S WORLD

When Basiago later began claiming to have physically travelled to Mars in the presence of a young Barack Obama⁸ and been chased by alien plesiosaurs himself, people naturally asked why he hadn't thought to mention any of this in his 2008

White Paper. His answer was simply that he had forgotten all about it at the time, as the CIA had used a special machine to suppress his memories. Basiago's story at this point becomes extremely convoluted and has been partially covered in *FT* before (**FT286:21**), so this is just a summary. Basically (so he says), his dad worked for an engineering firm which successfully developed time-travel for the US military, and the young Basiago was chosen to become the first-ever child time-traveller because the CIA, having used the technology to see into the future, had direct evidence that he would one day become President: at some time between 2016 and 2028, to be exact. Part of his historic future role would be to reveal to the world the hitherto-secret fact that America had time-travel and teleportation facilities, thus ushering in a new era of clean-energy transport, and so the authorities thought they had better introduce him to this technology early on in life.

The future leader had a great chance to brush up on his speechifying skills by being sent back to 1863 to witness Abraham Lincoln give his celebrated Gettysburg Address, and claims to be visible in a photo of the event, wearing overly-large shoes donated to him by a friendly cobbler after his own had gone missing during the time-travel process. (In this Basiago got off lightly; during one early teleportation experiment, another child accidentally "arrived a few seconds before his legs", leaving him "writhing in pain with just stumps".)

As time went by, and Basiago's work as a

"planetary-level whistleblower" spreading news about life on Mars brought him into contact with other fringe-theorists at weird-sounding conferences like Hawaii's 'Dolphins and Teleportation Symposium 2011', he began to retrieve previously blocked memories about his past. Slowly, he remembered that all future Presidents were briefed about their future time in office by secret agents, and that there was a clandestine 'Jump Room' programme in existence, of which both he and the young Obama had been a part, in which the US were secretly teleporting people to Mars, hoping to establish a colony there; of 97,000 beamed up thus far, only 7,000 had survived. Some tame Martians had been down here in their turn, too, but seeing as they were simply bald humanoids, whenever anyone saw them in the street they would just "think it's Telly Savalas", thus maintaining their cover. The task of Obama and Basiago on the Red Planet was "simply put, to be seen and not eaten" by either the plesiosaurs or a separate race of *Nosferatu*-like humanoids who enjoyed holding Earthling-barbeques, thus acclimatising the natives to mankind's colonial presence and giving the US a legal basis for claiming territorial property-rights on Mars, based upon the argument of visible prior occupancy.⁹

In terms of his actual political programme, this all translates into Basiago making a pitch for the vote of every conspiracy-nut going, whilst simultaneously courting the Green ballot. Naturally, he wishes to unveil America's teleportation and time-travel capabilities, using teleporters

to replace cars and trains and thus reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by some 60 per cent, but he also wants to pardon his fellow whistleblower Edward Snowden, disclose the *real* truth about 9/11, end chemtrail-spraying, close down the Shadow Government's secret concentration-camp network, ban GM foods to ensure that the small creatures, "part-micro-organism and part-robot", which they contain stop invading citizens' bodies and making them ill, prevent Nestlé from stealing public drinking-water, protect Earth from various fictional apocalypses, and promote the use of cold-fusion technology. He also wants to discover the truth about the mysterious forces which, according to one-time Bigfoot-hunter David Paulides, have recently been making people "melt directly into their pants" and then disappear within America's National Parks.¹⁰

Slightly less controversially, he also pledges to end mass immigration and look into ways of managing the forthcoming rise in unemployment when robots begin to steal people's jobs. He also pledges never to go on dire TV chat-shows and play the "Comedian-in-Chief" as Clinton and Obama did, which would indeed be most welcome; Mr Basiago is able to make people laugh through other means in any case. But let us be fair to the man. He appears genuinely to believe in what he is saying, and to keep on pushing it in the face of massive public ridicule and indifference, committed as he is towards telling what he thinks is the truth. That is actually a rather admirable quality in a prospective president, one that many recent Washington politicians have singularly failed to possess. I suppose that must be why he ends up winning the next election. **FT**



NOTES

- 1 Though he does seem to have *tried* to gain the Democrat nomination – harvesting, for example, one vote in the San Diego County primaries in July 2016. (<http://timesofsandiego.com/politics/2016/07/07/time-travelling-truth-candidate-for-president-wins-1-vote-locally/>)
- 2 All campaign-pledges throughout taken from <http://andy2020.net/proposals/>
- 3 Roosevelt did not claim to have seen Bigfoot. Instead, in his 1889 book *The Wilderness Hunter*, Teddy tells the story of a "weather-beaten old mountain-hunter" named Bauman, whose campsite was supposedly once attacked by a bipedal bear-like animal of some kind, which snapped the neck of Bauman's hunting companion. The word 'Bigfoot' didn't even exist in Roosevelt's day, and he calls it simply "some great goblin-beast", whilst presenting the event more as a ripping yarn (or "goblin-story") than anything else. The animal was only identified as Sasquatch by later readers. (<https://exemplore.com/cryptids/Teddy-Roosevelt-Bigfoot/www.bigfootencounters.com/stories/bauman.htm>)

bauman.htm has Roosevelt's actual text) In a 2016 Vice interview (see next note), Basiago cited most citizens' lack of knowledge about Roosevelt's non-existent Bigfoot encounter as a lamentable sign of contemporary Americans' ignorance of their own history!

4 www.curezone.org/forums/fm.asp?i=2239911. Oddly, in this interview Basiago neglects to mention his own 1966 Sasquatch-sighting down here on Earth, in spite of claiming to have talked to various witnesses from Washington State and Idaho. Sasquatch, he says "are very capable creatures" and "I wouldn't want to run into one in the woods". But ... he *did* run into one (indeed, two) in the woods, didn't he? By April 2016, he was certainly telling Vice.com that he had (see <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/even-the-presidential-candidate-who-believes-in-sasquatch-thinks-trump-is-crazy-election-campaign-time-travel-andrew-basiago>). In an attempt to get down with Vice's young, hipster-style audience, Basiago described putting Sasquatch on the Endangered Species List as being "probably my most funky proposal."

5 A collaborative global programme

of scientific experiment based around the various Earth-sciences and investigating outer-space; the last one was in 1957/58.

6 Letter to *National Geographic* online at www.scribd.com/document/14985658/Mars-Andrew-Basiago-Letter-to-the-Ngs-12-12-08; Basiago's White Paper online at www.projectmars.net/docs/research_papers/2008-12-12-MARS_Andrew_D_Basiago_The_Discovery_of_Life_on_Mars.pdf (All relevant quotations taken from this text) Basiago admits the "keen observer" has to "cast himself in the role of the aboriginal shaman" to properly view these simulacra, which, like Magic Eye pictures of old, may not be visible to all ...

7 www.planetary.org/blogs/emily-lakdawalla/2008/1305.html; the original, non-cropped NASA image downloaded and then enlarged by Basiago is available at <http://photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/catalog/PIA10214>

8 Then operating under the cunning alias of 'Barry', rather than 'Barack'.

9 Basiago's claims are all over the Internet. I have used the following as general sources,

and for quotes: www.curezone.org/forums/fm.asp?i=2238265; www.curezone.org/forums/fm.asp?i=2239911; www.curezone.org/forums/fm.asp?i=2239914; <https://theyeelessowl.wordpress.com>; www.wired.com/2012/01/obama-mars/; www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/28/andrew-basiago-seattle-attorney-time-travels_n_1438216.html; http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/marte/marte_vida02.htm; <http://exopolitics.blogspot.com/exopolitics/2011/12/discovery-of-life-on-mars-by-andrew-d-basiago-chosen-1-ufo-story-of-2008.html>; www.inverse.com/article/14577-confessed-time-traveler-andrew-basiago-is-running-for-president-knows-he-lies; <http://www.joanocean.com/SYMP011/>; see also Alfred Lambremont Webre, *The Omniverse: Transdimensional Intelligence, Time-Travel, The Afterlife and the Secret Colony on Mars*, Inner Traditions, 2015, Ch3.

10 www.lasvegasnow.com/news/iteam-strange-circumstances-surround-park-disappearances; again, the various pledges mentioned are all at <http://andy2020.net/proposals/>

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

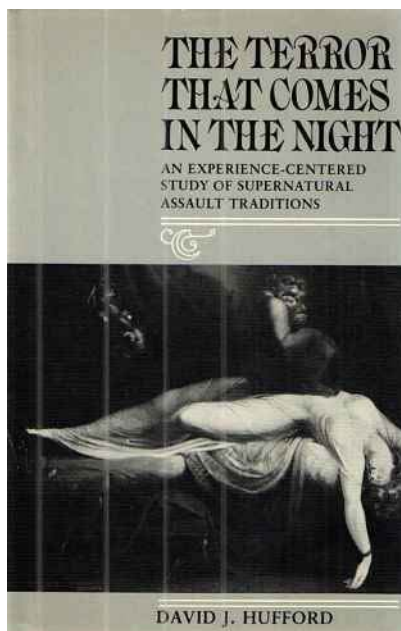
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

18. IN BED WITH AN OLD HAG

There is a certain class of classical music devotee who considers an interest in rock music and its relations irrational – it's obviously all ephemeral trash, undeserving of the attention of the world's finer minds (as, in their eyes, is Classic FM – France 3, Radio 3 and perhaps Lyric FM is where they live). One has some sympathy for this view, given the appalling crap that has infested the charts and the airwaves over the last couple of decades. At the same time one wonders just how much attention they've ever paid to the most original exponents of the popular musical arts, whose harmonies can be as disconcertingly ambiguous as any of Beethoven's, with lyrics as rich as any of Cafavy's or Lorca's or Blake's. It's only fair to say that on the other side of these tracks are people who think the only bearable item in the 'classical' repertoire is the *1812 Overture* and that Brian May is a genius. The parallel with the snooty 'scientific establishment' view of forteana, anomalistics and paranormal phenomena isn't hard to spot. Enter, now, a young anthropologist named David Hufford...

In the 1970s, David Hufford observed something like this division when he researched attitudes to the night terror called the Old Hag, as it was (and is) known in Newfoundland. As a student he had had the experience himself (see www.sleepparalysisworld.com/david-j-hufford/) and been baffled and frightened by it, so his personal interest was piqued when he found the Old Hag alive, well, and part of the Newfoundland community. There, if not exactly *blasé* about it, people were generally aware of the phenomenon, had a popular rationale for it and, crucially, a name for it; and consequently accepted it as a known experience. Elsewhere, where there was no supportive explanatory tradition, people who were visited by the Old Hag found themselves confused, alarmed, and (like Hufford) with no recourse to any form of reassurance. Psychologists who took any interest in the matter tended to dismiss its individual experiential character – in other words, it was irrational, a byproduct of a vague *mélange* (for which there was rather little evidence) of popular lore. They preferred to conflate – more precisely, confuse – the Old Hag with other sleep-related horrors – such as the succubus and incubus or just plain old bad dreams – so depriving it of its particularity.

Hufford, suitably intrigued, set out to discover whether the Old Hag was indeed the product of tradition and folklore, or a unique event in its own right. The test was whether, in different contexts, the experience remained essentially the same – or not. A marked difference (or several differences) would indicate the predominance of cultural influences.



Otherwise one was dealing with a singular, actual experience. The result of Hufford's investigations was *The Terror that Comes in the Night*, published in 1982.

Old Hag visitations follow a general pattern, but may differ in detail. Hufford shies away from offering a broad outline, probably because he considered his case studies were strongly indicative rather than comprehensive, and that his research on the phenomenon was but preliminary. Nonetheless, we can say that the hallucination of the Old Hag comes to you when you're on the edge of going to sleep (hypnagogic) or emerging from

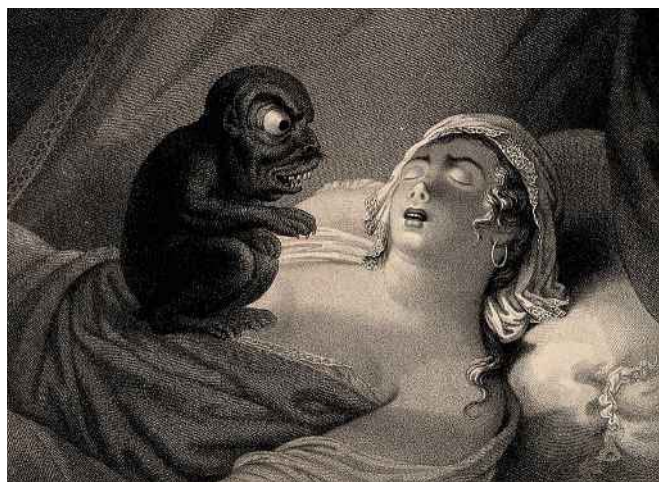
it (hypnopompic). A critical difference between an Old Hag hallucination and others arising on the thresholds of sleep and waking is that the latter present themselves as rather like a slideshow, a series of stills. The Old Hag presents continuous imagery and other effects, as does a movie. So, you are fully aware of your surroundings, but unnervingly are unable to move or speak. Generally, you're lying on your back, and your chest feels as if a mighty weight is crushing it, so that you can scarcely breathe. You're aware too of a presence in the room – and it's evil: a shrouded, seemingly human figure, sometimes actually sitting on you. The face often has few or no features except the eyes, which may be mere ghoulish black holes, or glowing red, or dark, distinct and piercing, among other things. The apparition may exude foul breath, or just stink of itself. There may be weird noises: some report hearing footsteps before seeing it enter the room, or the 'thing' makes what one witness called a "snurfling" sound. The bed may rock, or you may feel yourself sinking into it. You may get tingling sensations. The only way, it seems, to break out of this state and make the thing disappear is, somehow, to force oneself to move. Not surprisingly, most find the experience terrifying.

Within this general pattern, and even in Newfoundland, there are large variations in individual experiences. There is (in Newfoundland) also an interesting variety of time-honoured explanations for whatever one's undergone. One of these fallbacks isn't an explanation as such at all, in that it doesn't account for content, or offer a physical or metaphysical source of the Hag itself or its appearance or behaviour: which is to say that someone has called it up and, literally, saddled you with it, on account of some perceived slight or attack, or a rivalry in affections, or the like. In other words, you've been cursed. Thus the Hag is assimilated into much broader traditional ideas of witchcraft – or perhaps *vice-versa* – as it has (as we'll see) been dragooned into other paranormalities. But there are more mundane and perhaps more reassuring accountings. Indigestion may be responsible (a bit like blaming nightmares on eating cheese too near bedtime), a diagnosis that goes back at least as far as

Galen of Pergamon (AD 129–c.216). Or it may occur because of ‘stagnation of the blood’, a condition that allegedly occurs if you sleep in one position for too long and slow the circulation to deleterious effect. These still don’t explain why the Old Hag in particular manifests itself the way it does, which may be why a supernatural element is not necessarily excluded from people’s general acceptance of the experience – for where regarded as normal, the supernatural requires no explanation, just being one of the sometimes irrational, or rather a-rational, ways things are. Shit happens, as the bumper sticker has it.

The psychologists of the early 20th century, anxious to establish themselves as scientists, and therefore supremely rational, found this curious set of claimed experience and ‘superstition’ supremely irritating, and set about inflicting their own species of rationality upon it. The Freudian Ernest Jones, who applied his Master’s baseless, self-referring system of obsessions to the Old Hag experience, pronounced it to be: “a form of *Angst* [fear] attack, that... is essentially due to an intense mental conflict centering around [sic] a repressed component of the psychosexual instinct, essentially concerned with incest.” Some readers may feel the need for a small break here for a nice cup of tea, or medicinal brandy and cheroot, or treatment for a stitch. But hold on, for Jones gets better. Apparently the Hag visits the supine because that’s commonly how women find themselves during sexual intercourse, hence too the weight on the chest. (So, we wonder, does it follow that *men* suffering a visitation are repressed transgenderites?) The paralysis comes from the conflict between incestuous desire and the conscious need to reject it. Yes dear. Of course we’re all in denial about secretly dying to roger our mothers, fathers, and maybe the family goldfish. If this stuff is not as mad as a parcel of paranoid polecats, what is? Hufford, who is clearly underwhelmed, presents it with heroic self-control, remarking coolly that perhaps Jones’s conclusions were “arrived at more on theoretical than empirical grounds.”

Jones, for all his faults (Hufford details a fair few more), at least had the wherewithal to look into the history and etymology of the term ‘nightmare’, restoring it in his discussion to its original and specific meaning: ‘night crusher’. The Old Hag, which Jones doesn’t mention *per se*, is the local contemporary term, then, for the earliest meaning of ‘nightmare’, but he missed, in particular, the aspect of wakefulness (real or imagined) that characterises a Hag encounter. This imprecision about different species of nightmare infested later commentators on nightmares and sleep paralysis too,



LEFT: A case of the night terrors in an engraving by JP Simon, 1810.

experience in its own terms has implications for the treatment of many another bizarre experience. And so it fell to Hufford to nail the definition(s) down and to do the necessary research. For this alone his book is a classic.

The Old Hag experience, he found, has been easily assimilated into other streams of weird experience. Most obvious is the version of this form of sleep paralysis and hallucination in which the incubus or succubus creeps upon, or beneath, the chaste

and unwary in their sleep, and cause them to have (and worse, oops, enjoy) naughty erotic adventures. Mormons, he found, have incorporated the Hag into their traditions of Satanic temptation and assault. Some of his case histories show how the Hag has been integrated into sometimes quite complex reports of hauntings. Out-of-body experiences feature in some accounts. Hufford didn’t come across an alien abduction, but recognises by way of John Keel and Jacques Vallée how alien ‘bedroom visitors’ with all the attributes of the Hag have become part of contactee and UFO lore. Without a tradition such as that found in Newfoundland, the experience is latched onto the nearest available (or most appealing) context. And it is remarkably consistent.

Apart from the wealth of other insights, this is Hufford’s key finding and the answer to the question that triggered his research. He posed the problem thus: “The cultural source hypothesis predicts that... no complete, recognisable Old Hag attacks will be reported by people who have not had contact with the tradition. The experiential source hypothesis predicts that some such attacks will be reported... The substantial difference in predictions centres on whether substantial numbers of attacks are reported in the absence of prior knowledge about the experience...” As it turned out, not only was the Old Hag a widespread phenomenon, as research in the US showed, but had been met with by an unexpectedly large proportion of the population.

Having set this hare running, Hufford had a distinguished academic career, but never revisited the subject at book length, which is mildly surprising given the potential he had exposed. This is perhaps a minor mystery when put beside the fact that it’s now known that the Old Hag is found (by many another name) all over the world, and no one knows why this experience is so consistent, regardless of context. Nice one, eh? **FI**

David J Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-based Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, University of Pennsylvania Press 1982.

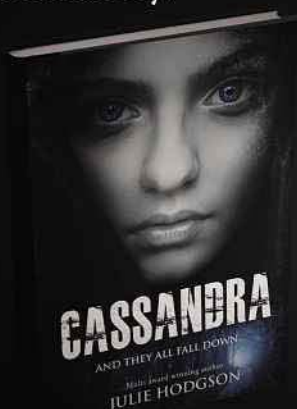
“A GREAT BOOK SHOULD LEAVE YOU WITH MANY EXPERIENCES, AND SLIGHTLY EXHAUSTED AT THE END. YOU LIVE SEVERAL LIVES WHILE READING IT.”

William Styron

including, as it happens, that Harvard professor of psychiatry John Mack. At one Hulsey Cason’s confluences of different meanings of the word ‘nightmare’, Hufford becomes quite animated: “All of Cason’s findings represent an average for at least three different kinds of events, each of which occur and are accurately reported at very different rates. His [statistical] results place him in the position of a man who is told that the camels in the zoo have humps; he then goes to the zoo and states: ‘I shall define camels, or elephants as they are sometimes called, as any animal found at the zoo, some of which are said to have humps.’ He would find, of course, that some camels have humps, and some have trunks, as claimed by those who call them elephants, but most have neither.” It all fits with Hufford’s observation of what he calls “the psychological dis-interpretation” of the Old Hag, in that “the occasional firsthand Old Hag account has been accounted for in a great variety of ways by a long series of authors. The effect has been to explain the phenomenon away while discouraging the development of a full description of it.” And as he points out, a closer examination of *this* bizarre

IN CASSANDRA: AND THEY ALL FALL DOWN

by Julie Hodgson, Cassandra Jones has violently beaten Braydon Taylor, a six-year-old. But that was 10 years ago. Now Dr. Sommer has taken her off her meds. As a 16-year-old, Cass enjoys hanging out at iCandy, an ice cream joint, with her best friends, Bindi and Leo. She attends Garden City High and loves learning Shakespearean plays from the handsome Mr. Mac. She's also in love with the town's newest resident: Braydon Taylor. But when she's alone, Cass battles incessant hand itching and hallucinations of creepy tentacles wiggling out of her skin. A compulsive need to run to remote locales places her at the center of an epidemic of dead teenagers being found at Jenson's Park. Will her alibi clear her of any wrongdoing or is there a serial killer loose in Garden City?



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www.juliehodgson.com

Please help us find

Adam Wilmott - Swindon, Wiltshire



Adam has been missing from Swindon since 27 September 2011. This month marks his 42nd birthday.

Adam is urged to call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, including the opportunity to send a message home in confidence.

Esra Uyrun - Clondalkin, Eire



Esra has been missing from Clondalkin since 23 February 2011. She was 37 years old when she went missing.

Esra is urged to call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, including the opportunity to send a message home in confidence.

Matthew Dyet - Eyemouth, Berwickshire



Matthew has been missing from Eyemouth since 17 February 2009. He was 58 years old at the time of his disappearance.

Matthew is urged to call Missing People on 116 000 or email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk for advice and support, including the opportunity to send a message home in confidence.

Suzanne Ibru - Southwark, London



Suzanne has been missing from Southwark since 6 January this year. She is 49 years old.

Suzanne we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message for you and help you to be safe.

Ruairi Aherne - Glasnevin, Dublin



Ruairi went missing from Glasnevin on 23 September 1984. He was 16 years of age at the time of his disappearance.

Ruairi we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message for you and help you to be safe.

Idriss Ali - London



This month marks the fourth anniversary of Idriss going missing from London. He was 37 years old when he was last seen on 3 February 2013.

Idriss we are here for you when you are ready; we can listen, talk you through what help you need, pass a message for you and help you to be safe.

Call or text 116 000

Email 116000@missingpeople.org.uk

It's free, 24hr and confidential

Missing People would like to thank
The Big Issue for publicising
vulnerable missing people on this
page

Our free 116 000 number is
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HAVE YOUR SAY

forum



Endangered portals of mystery

PHIL BAKER mourns the recent passing of an extraordinary Parisian bookshop and its gentle proprietor



PHIL BAKER is the author of acclaimed books about Dennis Wheatley and Austin Osman Spare and co-editor of *Lord of Strange Deaths: The Fiendish World of Sax Rohmer*.

One evening some years ago I was walking down a narrow street in Paris when I saw an extraordinary shop window. It was across the road from the former Beat Hotel and it was completely crammed, like a packed stamp album, with a combination of the most lurid and recherché books. Thomas De Quincey's *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant* was next to something called *Dripping Kiki*, and a book of George Grosz was perched above a guide to collecting vintage ray guns. There were the American "pop surreal" or "lowbrow" artists Tod Schorr and Robert Williams, and a mysterious Japanese book entitled *Familial Rapture*, with a cover photo of a bride and groom. There was a copy of *Latin est Artificiel* by the eccentric theorist of language Jean-Pierre Briset (who, I later discovered, also thought human beings were descended from frogs) together with the erotic photography of Gilles Berquet, and a cruder, less glossy sprinkling of fanzines and comic books. The French have an expression for window shopping, *leche vitrine*, window licking, and this was a window you could lick for a long time.

The door, totally opaque with stuck-on ephemera rather than merchandise, was even more of an artwork than the window. Old invitations for shows of cartoons by Roland Topor and punky woodcuts by Sophie Dutertre, with a host of other flyers and cards, were all densely tiled together above a disturbing graphic, partly obscured, of a man in a black hood holding up a child, captioned "*Mange ton Bonbongle*". Higher up was an entity by the artist Jephane de Villiers, on a card from the Galerie Oeuf Sauvage, looking like some kind of primitive fetish.

On venturing through the door, you encountered a grey-haired, modestly smiling man of indeterminate age,

Jacques Noel. Monsieur Noel was one of those shopkeepers who is really a curator. He had all the obvious things – the Situationists, William Burroughs, Robert Crumb – but his taste also went down darker alleys into less visited regions of outsider art, manga, and the occasionally queasy further fringes of *bandes dessinées* and the French BD underground: I believe the shop had old links to the post-punk comics collective Bazoooka, originally gathered around the newspaper *Libération*. He seemed to have "everything", or at least everything marginal, deviant and resistant to censorship, all miraculously gathered into his cavern.

Over the two decades I visited he went from relatively normal shelving to dense stacking (but he knew where things were, and he was handy with a ladder) and then to great piled heaps. Finally it was like a Kurt Schwitters *merz* *bild*, and M Noel appeared to be spending more time outside his grotto on a pavement chair, perhaps because there was no space left inside. Like the arcades, the cafés and the tribal art dealers, this bookshop, Un Regard Moderne on rue Git-le-Coeur ("Here-Lies-the-Heart"), was one of the wonders of Paris, but a couple of weeks ago a friend in the Latin Quarter called with end-of-an-era news: Jacques Noel had suddenly died.

It is hardly news that the small bookshop is increasingly a thing of the past. I can account for at least 20 shops I've outlived even in London, including a sort of shed in Paddington where the owner could only take cash; the Oriental bookseller Hosains, which had an exquisite display but could never be found open; a now demolished basement in Upper Tachbrook Street, where the owner urbanely presented a friend of mine with an ashtray, saying "Madam, smoking is encouraged in this shop"; and a normally mundane and disobliging



1. I wait in trepidation to be put right on this, by someone pointing out that in fact he could speak perfect English and simply chose not to with tourists like me, but I'm inclined to think he didn't because of his generally friendly manner, and the way that he would write prices on a piece of paper to make himself understood.

shop in Highgate, where one day the antediluvian owner invited me to go through a discreet door into a massive, cavernous, half-lit shop space behind the usual one, completely dwarfing it, like somewhere a secret society might gather in a horror film.

I often dream of second-hand bookshops, and I've always liked the way small shops feature as portals of mystery, menace and transformation in supernatural fiction, but for me the most magical of them, in the here and now, was Un Regard Moderne.

Jacques Noel presided over his emporium with a kindly, slightly melancholy air, and

he had endless patience with browsers. He never seemed to be in any hurry to sell anything, but was really more like an uncle quietly encouraging you to admire the carnivorous plants in his greenhouse. His tacit, unassertive manner was compounded by the fact that as far as I could tell he didn't speak very much English.¹

Un Regard Moderne was a wonderful place not just to buy things but to discover them. The last time I was there, I bought a hand-made book of collage by an artist called Marie Noel Doby, and with a gesture along the lines of "If you like that, you might like this", he almost shyly brought my attention to a special number of an illustrated journal, devoted to her work. I did like it, and it is only reading it now, since his death, that I discover she was his wife.

A night-time crowd gathered outside the shop after the bad news broke, as if keeping a vigil. Some people brought flowers and stuck them to the door, reminiscent of the impromptu shrines we see in London where cyclists have been killed. Of course, they were for Jacques Noel, but they were also for his creation, the shop. I've never seen a bookshop mourned with flowers before, but if I'd been in town I'd have put some there myself. **FT**

The Chascomús Teleportation Hoax

DR ROBERTO E BANCHS re-assesses one of the most influential cases of UFO-related ‘teleportation’ of a car and passengers. Translated and with background material added by **RICHARD W HEIDEN**.



DR ROBERTO E BANCHS is a psychologist and lives in Buenos Aires. Although not currently active in the UFO field, he consults for various bodies, among them the Comisión de Fenómenos Aeroespaciales of the Argentine Air Force. **RICHARD W HEIDEN** is an accountant and was assistant editor of the *APRO Bulletin* from 1978 until its end in 1987, and lives in Milwaukee.



Fenómenos Aeroespaciales of the Argentine Air Force. **RICHARD W HEIDEN** is an accountant and was assistant editor of the *APRO Bulletin* from 1978 until its end in 1987, and lives in Milwaukee.

The original incident is said to have happened in May 1968, in Chascomús, a regional hub approximately 100km (62 miles) south of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Briefly, Dr Gerardo Vidal and his wife were driving home one night from Chascomús to Maipú when, just outside Chascomús, their car was enveloped in a thick fog. The next thing they knew they were driving on a road near Mexico City in broad daylight – 7,250km (4,505 miles) to the northwest and on the other side of the South American continent. Their watches had stopped, and they found two days had passed. They went to the Argentine embassy in Mexico City, from where Dr Vidal called a relative in Maipú to report that they were well.

The ‘Vidal telecommunication’ – as it came to be known – was first reported in the Argentine press on 3 June 1968, in an article in the Buenos Aires evening daily *La Razón*, and it quickly spread abroad via the wire services and foreign correspondents. Since then, it has been included in numerous UFO magazines and books. Some of the early accounts included details that seemed to support the case and the existence of the witnesses; for example, when Oscar A Galíndez reported it in a 1968 issue of the UK *Flying Saucer Review*, he referred to “personal communications”, presumably from relatives of the Vidal family.¹

The Tucson, Arizona, based *APRO Bulletin* stated that APRO knew the Vidals' real names and that a field investigator was trying to learn more.⁵ Peter Rogerson wrote, years later, that: "In 1969 or 1970, I was at a UFO group meeting at which a British businessman who had worked in Argentina and who claimed to know

Dr Vidal's employer said that the case had been made up to explain Mrs Vidal's absence from home for psychiatric reasons."³ In 1970, *Flying Saucer Review* – citing a letter written to a European ufologist "by a member of the family" – reported that early the previous year, Señora Vidal had died of leukemia.⁴

It took a few more years before Argentine ufologists began to acknowledge that the case was a hoax. The September 1972 issue of the Spanish UFO magazine *Stendek* quoted Omar Pagani as saying that "it was a mystification, a hoax."

⁵ In 1973, Oscar Galíndez – again

BELOW LEFT: A newspaper ad for the satirical 1968 Argentine film *Che Oyni*.

BELOW RIGHT:
Director Aníbal Uset
with the stars of the
picture.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Dr Roberto Branches (left) with Jacques Vallée.

in *Flying Saucer Review* – admitted that it was impossible to find the alleged protagonists.⁶ However, these dismissals did not appear in any English-language books until 1990, when Jacques Vallée asserted, in his book *Confrontations*: “There are no Vidals.”⁷

Even so, the case continued to be reported as though it were true; for example, the Uruguayan UFO promoter and actor Fabio Zerpa, who lived in Argentina for many years, included it in his pro-UFO magazine *Cuarta Dimensión* in 1976, and again in 1985.⁸ Another influential endorsement came when Brad Steiger and Sherry Hansen Steiger devoted three full pages to it in their *UFO Qdusseu* (1999).⁹

ON 4 June 1968, the day after the original report in *La Razón*, a Reuters dispatch from Mexico City carried a denial of the Vidals' story by the Argentine embassy in Mexico City. This crucial datum – calling the story “absurd” – was repeated in at least three Buenos Aires newspapers the

**Their watches
had stopped
and two days
had passed**



Las Andanzas de un Teniente en el Lejano Oeste



No sucumbe ante las
balas, pero una mano
semejante lo doblega.

El director Calvin J. Tabor, responsable de los exitos de Ringo Wood, el defensor de la justicia, realtambién "Ringo no perdona" película que se verá a paz de hoy en el cine Concord.

En sus roles principales actuaron, además del cono- cido Ringo, Dan Vadia, Gop- p Daudier, Jacques Bernas y Né Calvo.

Hace muy poco tiempo terminó la guerra de Corea y no obstante algunos grupos de soldados surcoreos se han a reunido.

Un oficial confederado le
un hábil plan mediante
cual, además de infligirle
gran daño al enemigo, le
mita a poderse a él y a
securas, de una crecida
de dinero depositada en

La misión de Ringo, que viaja hacia ese destacamento acompañado de un sargento y un capitán, es averiguar qué es lo que le sucede a los soldados.

Cuando se halla en vias de destino la partida como una embajada que le tienen los soldados rebeldes, se da por bandidos.

Sin embargo desconfiar a
fue el que tentó a su
ciza. Su trabajo más im-
to es entonces ayudar al
del oro, para lo que debe
nizar contra los peces indios.

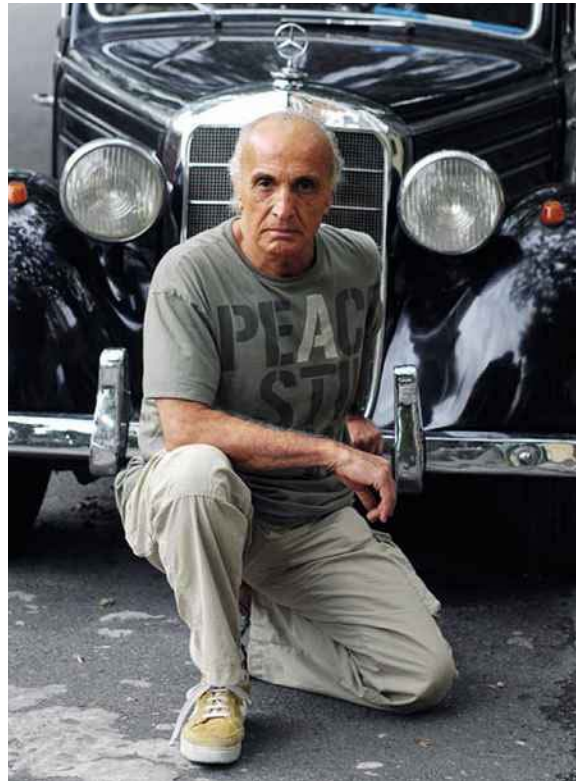


following day (*Clarín*, *Crónica*, and *La Nación*). However, many UFO researchers seem to be unaware of this refutation by Reuters – or at least distrustful of it – for it was never cited in any UFO books, at least not those in English.¹⁰ As far as those ufologists were concerned, the evidence against the case had been based purely on the inability to locate the supposed witnesses or, indeed, any sort of corroboration.

The first ufologist to suspect the actual origin of the teleportation story was Alejandro Chionetti, an Argentine ufologist now living in the United States, who had connections to the film industry and who deserves credit for helping expose the case, which he investigated between 1981 and 1984.¹¹ As a student of cinema, Chionetti realised the possible connection between the story and the Argentine movie director Aníbal Uset. In 1982, he even travelled to Maipú to locate the Vidals and their supposed relatives, but failed.

Now, after almost 50 years, I can finally report a confession, which I obtained while doing research for an Argentine biographical UFO directory.¹² Aníbal Uset had been responsible for the satirical movie *Che OVNI*, the first Argentine film to exploit the theme of UFOs or extraterrestrials. This bizarre, surrealistic comedy premiered in Buenos Aires on Wednesday, 7 August 1968, just three months after the alleged teleportation.

In two interviews, during October 1998, Uset clearly stated that, along with “reporters and others”, he had invented the Chascomús teleportation as a publicity stunt, but he never explained the nature of the help he received from those unnamed reporters. The idea, he said, was to spread a fantastic story based on the plot of the film, and this turned into



the paradigmatic and well-known ‘Vidal case’. The movie’s poster (which was also used in newspaper ads) even shows a UFO carrying off an automobile beneath it – a Peugeot 403, just like the Vidals were said to have driven.

During my first contact with Uset, he told me plainly: “I believe in extraterrestrials, but not that they visit us. I invented the protagonists – Vidal and Señora Vidal – on the TV magazine *Sábados Circulares* (‘Circular Saturdays’). The following Saturday a person came forward who said what he saw, and so on. Every Saturday another ‘witness’ came on.” Then the details followed. “The flying saucer was a means for us to get to

ABOVE: Argentine movie producer and director Aníbal Uset.

Europe,” he admitted. When I asked him how the idea arose, he said that it originated when he took a trip to Colonia, in Uruguay, during which a reporter agreed to help him. Together they invented the whole story. Uset gratefully accepted the publicity stunt, which he said had exceeded all expectations. He also explained that the name ‘Vidal’ was inspired by the Argentine town of Coronel Vidal. Vidal’s wife, Dolores, was named after another town in the area, although as far as we know her first name never actually appeared in print.¹³

At our next meeting – also in October 1998, this time with a tape recorder present – Uset was more restrained, varying his account to protect some names, saying only that the idea had arisen with an acquaintance of his, the director of a Uruguayan radio station whose name he did not remember and who had now passed away. Nor did he identify the reporter whom, he said, had accompanied him to Uruguay.

He also doubted whether Nicolás Mancera – the director of *Sábados Circulares* – could remember or recognise the background of the case. Some months later, I spoke with Mancera at length by telephone and, as Uset predicted, Mancera said he could not remember the story. This is highly curious given the repercussions the episode has had within ufology and its retention in the collective memory.

One could wish for more loose ends to be tied up, or for statements from others involved with the film. Uset died on 16 August 2015, but his testimony remains significant and he struck me as completely sincere. He had nothing to gain by admitting to the Chascomús teleportation hoax, and everything to lose in confessing to having been behind it. **FT**

NOTES

1 *Flying Saucer Review* 14:5 (Sept-Oct 1968) pp3-4.

2 *APRO Bulletin* (Sept-Oct 1968), p7.

3 Peter Rogerson, “Recovering the Forgotten Record: Notes Towards a Revisionist History of Abductions – Part 4”, *Magonia* 50 (Sept 1994). See note 9. (The article is online at <http://magoniamagazine.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/notes-towards-revisionist-history-of.html#more>)

4 *Flying Saucer Review* 16:5 (Sept-Oct 1970) p11.

5 *Stendek* (CEI, Barcelona, Spain) 10 (Sept 1972) p31n.

6 *Flying Saucer Review* 19:3 (May-June 1973) p6.

7 Jacques Vallée, *Confrontations: A Scientist's Search for Alien Contact* (Ballantine, 1990) p96.

8 *Cuarta Dimensión* 30 (Apr or May 1976) pp20-24; 124 (Jan 1985) p21. After Jacques Vallée read an advance copy of this article, he wrote to the

co-author (RWH), “In vol. 3 of my *Forbidden Science* (entry for 20 April 1980) I mention a discussion in Mar del Plata on that day with Fabio Zerpa who laughed when I asked him about the Vidal case and said he had found a lot of people who said they knew the Vidals but he could never meet the Vidals.”

9 Brad Steiger and Sherry Hansen Steiger, *UFO Odyssey* (Ballantine, 1999) pp41-44. This is from the same publisher as the Vallée book;

in fact, at the back there is a full-page ad for the paperback edition of *Confrontations*. Of course, this does not mean that the Steigers had read or even seen the book.

10 The case had been mentioned in *Fortean Times*: see **FT:192:56, 194:72**.

11 Chionetti also shared his suspicions about the case and the movie with others, but they did not give him due credit.

12 The directory was

eventually published as *Guía Biográfica de la Ufología Argentina/ Los Primeros Veinticinco Años (1947-1972)*, (Cefai Ediciones, Buenos Aires, 2000). The entry for Uset is on p53.

13 Another version of Uset’s confession – substantially the same but with some differences – was published in the December 1997 issue of the magazine *La Cosa*, a copy of which Uset himself loaned me to make a photocopy.

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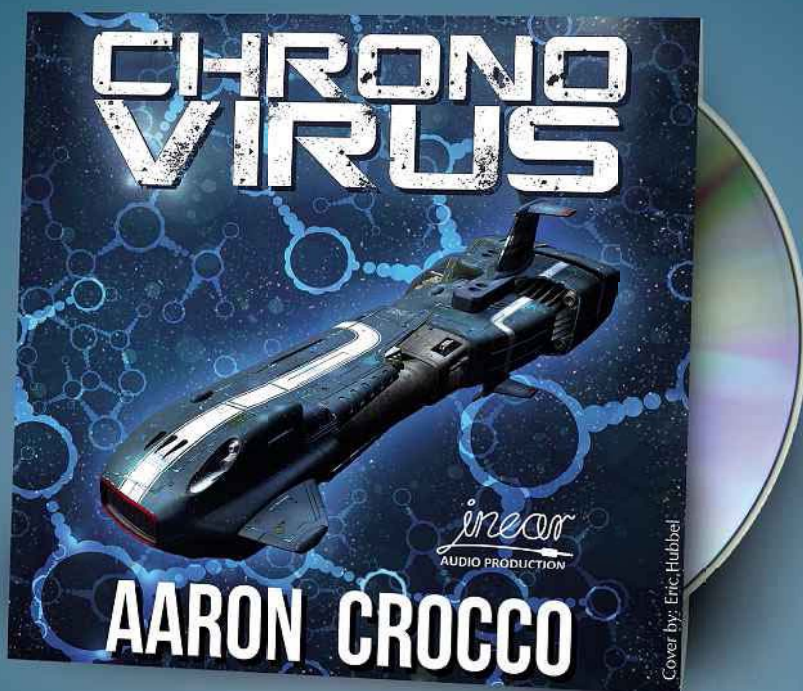
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This month's books, films and games

reviews



A fabulous cameraderie...

The father of the autocratic Scientology leader describes how his asthmatic young son rose through the ranks to head an abusive (and rather small?) church



Ruthless

Scientology, My Son David Miscavige and Me

Ron Miscavige with Dan Koon

Silvertail Books 2016

245pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781909269453

What must it be like to know you've raised a monster?

In his youth Ron Miscavige was introduced to the Church of Scientology and found it helpful. When he joined in 1970, he writes, "A fabulous camaraderie existed among the people there. We shared a feeling that Scientology was something that was going to help everyone: the world, oneself, one's family, everybody." He became convinced that Scientology worked when his nine-year-old son David was cured of his asthma attacks by a Scientology process. This was the boy who would grow up to become the autocratic leader of the Church of Scientology, successor to founder L Ron Hubbard. To avoid confusion, 'Miscavige' on its own in this review refers to David Miscavige, the author's son.

The entire family joined the movement, taking courses to improve themselves and to move up the Bridge, the long path of advancement through training. At 16, with his father's support, Miscavige dropped out of school and joined the Sea Org[anisation], the elite of dedicated Scientologists who pledge themselves for a billion

years' service. "I had gotten so much out of Scientology and had seen David helping others with it, so I thought it would be a terrific career for him," Ron Miscavige writes, with no apparent irony. "He was bright and I thought he would be successful."

The teenage Miscavige joined the Commodore's Messenger Organisation, working directly for Hubbard. What could have been just messenger-boys and -girls became a powerful group, effectively Hubbard Youth, with the power to issue orders and impose punishments on his behalf; "they even had authority over longtime Scientologists, many of whom had been in Scientology for decades and had reached its highest levels," the author writes. By the time Hubbard died in 1986, Miscavige, at only 25, had manoeuvred himself into an extraordinarily powerful position as chairman of the board (CoB, as he is usually known inside the Church) of the Religious Technology Centre, which has control of all of Hubbard's writings; as all the courses and all the Tech[nology] of the Church of Scientology depend on Hubbard's words, Miscavige was *de facto* head of the Church. He swiftly got rid of older, well-respected and formerly powerful people who had worked closely with Hubbard and had been his lieutenants. Miscavige deals harshly with anyone who displeases him. At Scientology's Gold base near Hemet, California, a pair of trailer offices have been turned into a prison known as the Hole. "At one point, iron bars were placed over the windows, and a guard stood outside the only exit 24 hours a day," the author writes. Senior people in

"They followed me... They photographed me wherever I went... They rifled through my trash"

the Church would be confined there for months at a time, sleeping on the floor under desks; they would be allowed out for an hour a day, to be marched to another building for a shower. They would write "page after page of their transgressions day after day", or stand in front of each other "confessing their misdeeds or evil intentions". If someone failed to confess, "the person was screamed at and often slapped, pushed and punched by other persons held there". The Church denies that any of this takes place.

Relations between Miscavige and his father grew increasingly strained. "All these restrictions – you have to have your mail checked, you cannot go on liberty, you can't go to a store, and many more – each is another little bar for your jail cell. You build your own prison and you live in it." So why don't people simply leave? Apart from the fact that there are wire fences around the base, and guards at the entrances, "many people ... have been in Scientology for 20, 30, 40 years or even longer, and they have zero savings. They live from week to week on their \$50 allowance. They don't have a car. They have next to no Social Security..." Beyond this, they have no marketable skills in the outside world, and many have no family or friends outside.

Where would they go, and how would they survive? "If they left, they would literally be out on the street."

Eventually Ron Miscavige and his second wife escaped from Gold base and left the Church – and his son then placed him under full-time surveillance by private investigators. "During the year and a half they followed me... they sat behind me in restaurants to overhear my conversations." If he was using a computer at the local library they "peeked over my shoulder to take screenshots that showed whom I was emailing. They followed me wherever I drove. They put a GPS on my car... They photographed me wherever I went... They even rifled through my trash."

But Miscavige's empire is crumbling around him. First his niece Jenna, and now his father, have written pain-filled books denouncing not the religious practices of Scientology, but the corrupt organisation under its dictatorial leader. Over the last few years, many in very senior positions have left. The Church of Scientology still gives the impression that it's a significant religious movement with millions of members, but observers believe that active members now number fewer than 25,000 worldwide. There may now be more Scientologists outside the Church of Scientology than within it; known as the Freezone, they see themselves as a sort of Protestant Reformation, still following the teachings but turning their back on the Church.

David V Barrett

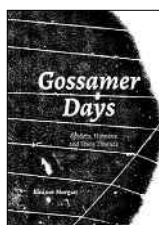
Fortean Times Verdict

A VERY PERSONAL STORY OF A
RUTHLESS RELIGIOUS LEADER

8

Web designers

The humble spider's silk appears in dresses, musical instruments... and caps of death



Gossamer Days

Spiders, Humans and their Threads

Eleanor Morgan

Strange Attractor Press 2016

Pb, pp167, illus, plates, bib, £14.99, ISBN 9781907222351

This study of the human use of spider silk is infused with a creative sensibility. Only an artist would approach the relationship between spiders and sound through a tale of spiders attracted to the singing of 19th century schoolgirls; only an artist would follow this by creating a spider silk necklace to which she attached a web while she hummed, to experience and observe the response.

Eleanor Morgan has a deep and intuitive relationship with spiders, beginning with her attempts to collect and use spider silk in her artworks. From this a life-long obsession developed, and *Gossamer Days* illustrates just how far she has taken this. Beautifully illustrated with her own drawings, it begins with Morgan's experiments to collect useable spider silk and expands to consider how others have tried to do the same. There have been many failed attempts to produce it commercially, leading to innovative niche uses, in gunsights and astronomical instruments for example, where spider silk is perfect for creating precise cross-hairs and imaginative one-offs. One of the plates shows a magnificent and laboriously produced spider silk dress created for the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Other cultures have also found important uses for spider

silk, often poorly understood by Westerners. The Wellcome Collection holds a 'smothering hood' of spider silk, allegedly used to suffocate widows in Vanuatu. Other museums have similar items described as night caps, smoking caps and a 'cap of death', all of which are part of the regalia for male initiation ceremonies in the island in which spider webs play an important part – Morgan includes a resonantly spooky photo of an initiate clad head to foot in webs. Elsewhere they have become vital parts of musical instruments, including the extraordinary *nyastaranga* from northern India – horns pressed against the throat and activated by humming that use spider silk as a resonating membrane. Morgan has gone to considerable lengths to find these uses for spider silk; they have not been well documented and their sources are obscure and often confused. She has a fine eye for character, excavating a gallery of eccentrics and innovators as obsessed with the silk as she is.

Morgan has a naturalist's eye for spiders' identification and behaviour, and her writing is among the best nature writing you will find anywhere. She has delved into the biology of silk (spiders produce seven different kinds) and the web construction of different species, and seems to have retuned her senses to immerse herself in a world filled with spiders, closing the book with a description of the seven species she can see on her urban balcony, where she sits, entirely at home with her arachnid neighbours.

This is a delightful book to hold and to read, an excellent addition to the library of anyone interested in the stranger corners of biology or human culture.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

AN INSPIRING WEB OF UNUSUAL ARACHNOID INSPIRATION

9

A Magician Amongst the Spirits

Harry Houdini

Cambridge University Press 2011

Pb, xix, 294pp, illus, ind, £26.99, ISBN 9781108027489



The introduction to this facsimile of Houdini's 1924 sceptical masterwork, in which he sought to expose mediums and psychics as frauds and charlatans, explains the great magician's motivation: at the beginning of his career, he put on fake séances as an entertainment, not realising the degree to which such deceit toyed with the sentiments of his audience.

When Houdini suffered a bereavement, he declared that he would have given the greater part of his wealth in exchange for just one word from his much loved departed mother. Only then did he understand the visitors' need to repeatedly attend séances and to pay for private readings with mediums. Such desperation is reminiscent of fellow sceptic Eric Dingwall (mentioned several times) who, despite having exposed numerous mediums as fakes during his investigative career with the Society for Psychical Research, tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully to make contact with his wife Margaret following her sudden death in 1976.

Houdini's tours of Europe in the early 1920s showed him how the "medium craze" had swept the continent in the aftermath of the First World War; he regarded Spiritualism as a world menace that threatened those possessed of a highly-strung psychological character who had suffered a bereavement.

Like his friend Harry Price, Houdini had accumulated a huge library of books dealing with all aspects of the supernatural: Spiritualism, witchcraft, demonology, ghosts and all manner of psychic phenomena. But unlike the equally well-read Price, Houdini stated that throughout over 30 years of investigation, he had not once come across a medium whom, he felt, had demonstrated genuine

psychic ability. As members of the Magic Circle, Price and Dingwall were able to recognise techniques of sleight-of-hand, misdirection and other conjuring tricks employed by mediums. How much better equipped, then, was Houdini, a magician of international renown.

A Magician Amongst the Spirits is composed of two elements; firstly, a sceptical overview of the Spiritualist movement from its inception in 1848 with the Fox sisters, through to the Davenport brothers, Daniel Dunglass Home (Browning's 'Mr Sludge'), Eusapia Palladino and others, all of whom are dismissed as fakes, on the basis of the evidence of contemporary witnesses' statements taken from his vast library. The second part deals with those mediums whom Houdini encountered in person.

But even those he did not investigate personally – stars of Spiritualism before his time such as the celebrated Dr William Slade of 'spirit slate writing' fame – he still subjected to close analysis, by virtue of his extensive knowledge of the equipment employed by stage magicians. Indeed, an entire chapter is devoted to the devices with which writing upon a slate by an unseen hand could be simulated.

The book's mood of unrelenting suspicion concerning human nature – the cynicism of those who gull their audiences and the gullibility of those audiences – is leavened by the apparently genuine friendship between Houdini and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Whilst completely at odds over the veracity of the Spiritualist movement, Houdini writes of Doyle as his friend, and as a man whose sincere belief in the psychic world he respects. (Houdini is too diplomatic to suggest that Conan Doyle's interest in mediumship was not an objective scientific inquiry, but motivated by the loss of his brother and son, and a desire to make contact with them. A similar motivation may be ascribed to Sir Oliver Lodge, that other man of letters who championed the Spiritualist movement and whose son Raymond fell in the Great War.) One of the most compelling and moving chapters of the

book deals with a séance held by Conan Doyle, his wife, and Houdini, at which Lady Doyle claimed to be the conduit for a letter addressed to Houdini from his dead mother. "I was willing to believe, even wanted to believe," the great illusionist writes.

Houdini's respect for Conan Doyle's sincerity is contrasted by anger and outrage at what he saw as the cynicism and immorality exhibited by fake mediums. More than once, he writes of their 'evil' or their 'vice,' their 'crimes' and 'moral perversion' at fooling a needy public.

Whilst by no means an objective examination of the Spiritualist movement, this unashamedly passionate condemnation of psychical fakery is a useful historical account of mediumship during the late 19th century and the beginnings of the 20th. It's also a historical document, a time capsule that testifies to an era when psychic investigation was taken seriously – with scientists, psychologists and major literary figures participating in its research – rather than being pushed to the Channel Four fringes of popular culture as it is today.

Christopher Josiffe

Fortean Times Verdict

A PASSIONATE DENUNCIATION OF PSYCHICAL FAKERY

8

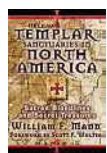
Templar Sanctuaries in North America

Sacred Bloodlines and Secret Treasures

William Mann, foreword by Scott F Wolter

Destiny Books 2016

BIB DEETS 416p (illustrated), ISBN: 9781620555279



Following his previous monographs *The Knights Templar in the New World* (2004) and *The Templar Meridians* (2005), William Mann rigorously documents his research into the claim that the secrets of the Templars found residency within the ritual practices of the Anishinabe and Algonquin peoples of North America.

Mann endeavours to look at the issues surrounding the

dispersal of this secret knowledge by looking at some more familiar territory such as the Merovingian bloodline, the activities of such personages as Prince Henry Sinclair, the political wrangling between vying European political dynasties and monastic orders from the mediæval period onwards, and Masonic history. At the heart of his research is Mann himself; he claims descent from both Sinclair and Native American bloodlines.

Less familiar to the reader may well be the premise upon which Mann bases his quest for the Templar secrets. Using two key works by the artists Nicolas Poussin ('The Shepherds of Arcadia') and David Teniers ('St Anthony and St Paul Fed by Ravens'), he applies techniques of speculative cartography and forensic navigational histories to ascertain the whereabouts of the hidden North American Templar sanctuaries. Interwoven into the body of his journey are cultural, historical and philosophical surveys that take in the Classical world to the contemporary, ostensibly in support of his historical claim.

For my part I found the book rather confusing, as knowledge of the author's previous works is assumed, and the reader is never given a clear idea as to the nature of the Templar secrets and why they may be of any importance. The condensed history is, at times, stodgy and the archæological and cartographical material somewhat obtuse.

This is a book for a reader who has worked through other Grail myth and bloodline exposés and now wishes to engage with more recognisable scholarship and genealogical research.

Templar Sanctuaries may well appear to readers familiar with the broad strokes of the subjects discussed as a rather wordy and demanding introduction to what is still an ongoing source of mystery and intrigue for many.

However, Mann's enthusiasm for his subject and his position within it is evident and commendable.

Chris Hill

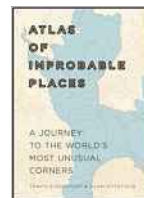
Fortean Times Verdict

ENTHUSIASTIC BUT CONFUSING STUDY OF AMERICAN TEMPLARS

4

Weird world

Fifty-one peculiar places to add to the discerning forteen traveller's bucket list



Atlas of Improbable Places

A Journey to the World's Most Unusual Corners

Travis Elborough & Alan Horsfield

Aurum Press 2016

Hb, 224 pp, illus, £20.00, ISBN 9781781315123

Anyone who likes the Fortean Traveller feature in *FT* is going to love this book. It consists of 51 short essays on strange or wonderful places, most being four pages long, one page being the map, the rest well-written and informative text, and one photograph. The maps, in Alan Horsfield's cartography, are stylish and very attractive.

The book is arranged into six chapters: 'Dream creations', 'Deserted destinations', 'Architectural oddities', 'Floating worlds', 'Otherworldly spaces' and 'Subterranean realms'. Some of the places chosen are well-known and fairly predictable, such as Mt Roraima, the inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Lost World*. But, for instance, I had never heard of Auroville before; a utopian settlement in SE India. And while I knew of the existence of Wrangel Island off the coast of Siberia, I never knew its curious history.

It won't take long to get through this book; it's the sort of thing where you read one essay, and then say, "Well, I'll just read one more" – and then one more, and so on. But part of the interest of this book is its potential as a starting point for more exploration. Latitude and longitude of each place are given, so it's fun to put these into Google Earth and look around.



Model of Auroville layout

(You do have Google Earth, right? Essential for any forteen. Even the Pro version is free now.)

Of course, with only 51 places selected, there are bound to be omissions, and everyone will have their own list. I would have included the village of Gibellina in Sicily, abandoned in 1968 and turned into what must be one the largest sculptures on the planet, and probably the most bizarre place I have ever visited myself.

The weakest part of the book is the photographs. I can live with the fact that they are all a rather blurry monochrome, but they often give a poor idea of what the places actually look like. The photo of Auroville, for instance, shows only a single building, where what one would like is a panorama. Cue Google Earth for lots more pictures and a virtual exploration. The picture selection is the only thing that has me deducting a point from the overall score, and I suspect it reflects what was available to the authors. I doubt if they actually journeyed to all the places featured.

I spotted a couple of slips. It would be remarkable indeed if the deserted Presidio Modelo prison in Cuba featured four 60-storey towers; they are six storeys high. And while I know it gets very hot in Southern California, I doubt if it reaches 120°C. But the overall message is: buy this book. It will grace any forteen's coffee table.

Roger Musson

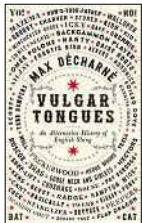
Fortean Times Verdict

A WONDERFUL SELECTION OF VERY STRANGE PLACES

9

Riding Saint George?

A lively guide to five centuries of English slang and profanity is a necessary counterblast to PC's suppression of language



Vulgar Tongues

An Alternative History of English Slang

Max Décharné

Serpent's Tail 2016

Hb, 400pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781846885613

Hear the word 'superfly' and what image comes to mind? Ron O'Neal in a white fedora, double-breasted Bri-Nylon suit and long shoes, standing beside his customised Cadillac Eldorado? His extravagant attire, the calling card of his profession, is a clue to the epithet's origins in the 18th century, when it was first applied to anyone who was knowing or streetwise – a dandy highwayman, a member of the Hellfire Club or, perhaps, Jack Harris 'Pimp General of all England', whose landmark publication *List of Covent Garden Ladies* was published yearly from 1757 to 1795 as a guide for the buck-about-town to the attractions of the many 'vaulting houses' of the locale.

Such is the detailed delight in which Max Décharné charts the progress of profanity through this tome, from Elizabethan origins in Thomas Harman's 1567 *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursetors Vulgarly Called Vagabones* through the criminal justice system, theatre, showground and music hall, military dormitory and cottage chatter of lizzies and queens to the Roger's *Profanisaurus* of today. As well as identifying these groups – and their interconnecting Venn diagrams of popular music, pulp fiction, recreational libations and the sex

industry – as the wellspring of his subject, Décharné's discourse is rich with regional variations. He traces the origins of Rap to Richard Blakeborough's 1898 *Wit, Character Folklore & Customs of the North Riding of Yorkshire* (Rap, n, A friendly chat Ex. —Cu' thi waays, an' lets 'ev a pipe an' a bit o' rap.) and takes a Cockney walkabout with Ronnie Barker, Reggie Kray, Robin Cook, Frank Norman and Keith Moon, all of whom have made their contributions to the cataloguing of Rhyming Slang.

The entertainment to be found within this etymology is legion, but Décharné also has serious points to make about the creeping suppression of language through political correctness.

This is a timely reminder of Orwell's warning, via the ever-decreasing Newspeak Dictionary in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which aims to boil language down to one single word that: "might bring joy to the heart of any would-be dictator" but "attack the very impulse which gives rise to slang; a type of speech which revels in multiple layers of meaning and alternative readings of familiar words."

Luckily for us, Décharné is a master of the manifold, who wields a light touch over a heavy amount of research. His parallel careers as a musician and expert on *noir* film and fiction make him particularly good on the jazz origins of so much jive. His list of singles from 1921 to 1945 presents the terms 'rock 'n' roll', 'reefer', 'cat' and 'groovy' long before they came into common usage, many of them the legacy of band leader Cab Calloway, who produced his own *Hepster's Dictionary* in 1938 that rapidly infused the pages of crime fiction with "the wisdom of illicit possibilities". But Décharné is just as good marshalling the military: the chapter on how soldiers, sailors and airmen used slang as their shield is as moving as it is amusing. After all, from

these deadpan ranks rose Eric Partridge, "arguably the greatest slang lexicographer of the twentieth century".

The many kinks in the course of cant are acknowledged by the author, whose previous foray into the field, 2000's *Straight From the Fridge, Dad: A Dictionary of Hipster Slang* now shares shelf-space with the dreaded *Hipster Handbook*, Robert Lanham's 2002 guide to geekery that would spawn the Shoreditch Tosser. "Sometimes the hip word of today will turn unexpectedly into the embarrassingly square world of tomorrow," he says, helpfully providing the origins of the word 'geek' as a performer from the American freakshow whose job it was to bite the heads off chickens.

It is the computer geeks of today whom the author fears will fulfill Orwell's prophecy. In closing, he summons his spirit guide, Captain Francis Grose, whose 1785 *Classical Dictionary of The Vulgar Tongue* catalogued all the words Dr Johnson's contemporaneous *Dictionary of the English Language* did not, thus evoking: "the realities of that time far more honestly than the corporate-speak and PC euphemisms of today could ever reflect our own". He imagines this Admiral of the Narrow Seas posting drunken boasts of Riding St George and being lynched by Twitter users before the monitoring secret services can silence him.

Can we keep our sayings schtum now that Big Brother is watching us all? Décharné's work ably demonstrates that the creation of slang is something hardwired in us, the need to mock suppression being the mother of its invention – one brilliant argument for never keeping a civil tongue.

Cathi Unsworth

Fortean Times Verdict

A TOWERING MONUMENT TO THE MOTHER TONGUE

9

The Death and Resurrection of Elvis Presley

Ted Harrison

Reaktion Books 2016

Hb, 258pp, notes, ind, illus, £16.00,

ISBN 9781780236377



Peter Guralnick's exhaustive, two-volume biography of Elvis Presley is a huge accomplishment, but it can leave the reader

feeling that its subject's life was, for long stretches, startlingly devoid of meaningful incident. No such worries with Ted Harrison's fascinating, and considerably more concise, examination of the King's post mortem career, which offers plenty in the way of drama, controversy and flat-out weirdness. It's a definitive overview of how, ever since Elvis left the building, we've witnessed the simultaneous growth of a business empire whose aim is to both police and monetise the singer's iconic image and a worldwide subculture in which fans "were liberated by Elvis's physical death to reinvent him for themselves"; the two camps haven't always seen eye to eye, of course, when it comes to preserving Presley's considerable pop-cultural legacy. With a keen understanding of how modern myths take shape and a sympathetic eye for his subject, Harrison surveys the contemporary landscape of Elvis impersonators, academic interpreters and followers and finds something very akin to a new religion taking shape: it's a story complete with holy relics, annual pilgrimages, apostolic succession, theological schisms, messianic imagery and perhaps the possibility of transcendence. Like another, somewhat better established, worldwide faith, this new quasi-religion also dwells on the idea of physical resurrection, and the book offers a useful summation of the current state of play concerning claims both of Elvis's continued survival and those claiming to be his unrecognised offspring.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

THE KING IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE KING...

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ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

Monsters Among Us

An Exploration of Otherworldly Bigfoots, Wolfmen, Portals, Phenoms, and Odd Phenomena

Linda S Godfrey

Tarcher Pedigree 2016

Pb, 352pp, notes, £14.99, ISBN 9780399176241



For 23 years of her writing career, Linda Godfrey has collected extraordinary tales of encounters with impossible creatures and presents them here with good writing and a fairly balanced assessment of their value.

What makes this collection more than usually interesting is that many of the accounts had to be prised out of the witnesses who had only confided in their closest friends and therefore will be new to most readers.

Godfrey has written several books on such modern encounters, one of which focused on 'wolfmen' (her chief interest). Here her stories are divided into those that describe alternative realities; those about humanoid 'beasts' (including Bigfoot); entities that invade bedrooms, follow or persecute; others associated with mists and shadows; and still others seemingly related to UFOs of different kinds, and 'portals'.

The book will certainly interest entity researchers.

Afterlife

A History of Life after Death

Philip C Almond

IB Tauris 2016

Pb, 236pp, notes, bib, ind, £25.00, ISBN 9781784534967



Not so much another study of tales of Near-Death Experiences (NDEs) as a comprehensive account of the nature of the Afterlife as imagined within different cultures through history. Nor is this a slight or New Age-y treatment, but a solid, detailed, survey by an emeritus professor of religion at the University of Queensland's Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, and it comes with a full aca-

demic apparatus.

The book moves from the earliest surviving records on the topic, through the Classic ages of Elysian Fields, Tartarus and the River Styx, and into the very complex era influenced by the main monotheistic religions. Professor Almond writes compassionately about the very human concerns of people from all walks of life (eg. those about to be eaten by cannibals, or those who have lost limbs and wonder if they will be whole in the Hereafter), and the many citations and references do not disturb his concise story-telling. The chapters divide the subject into seven topics: the destiny of the dead; the geography of the Underworld; the nature of souls; Purgatory and Limbo; sleep and death; salvation and damnation; and the rich variety of heavens and hells.

Although the main focus is on the Mosaic religions, there are comparisons with Buddhism, Hinduism and others in passing. Almond sums up his rational approach thus: "I expect death is one event that I shall not live to regret, even though I live in hope that I might be pleasantly, and not unpleasantly, surprised."

Recommended to all.

Lost Powers

Reclaiming our Inner Connection

J Douglas Kenyon, ed.

Atlantis Rising 2016

Pb, 247pp, illus, \$16.95, ISBN 9780990690436



This anthology of 32 articles from the pages of *Atlantis Rising* magazine, selected by its editor JD Kenyon, covers a very wide range of subjects, divided into five sections, dealing generally with 'Restoring the Body', 'Beyond the Senses', 'Super Powers', 'Life after Death', and 'Meta-Dimensions'. A few of the papers seem like typical New Age waffle – such as 'Mysteries of Body Wisdom' and another discussing whether the human aura is "real or imaginary". But the majority of the topics will interest

all manner of fortune tellers as they debate time travel, alchemy, longevity among yogis, reports of reincarnation following wars, the death of Houdini, Conan Doyle's interest in investigation of crimes with clairvoyance, Abraham Lincoln's interest in the Afterlife, seemingly alternative realities, the earliest experiments in human flight, both Mark Twain's and Mary Shelley's interest in the supernatural, immortality and how spiritualism copes with the problem of suicide.

Some of the authors will be familiar to *FT* readers, including Frank Joseph, David Childress, and Robert M Schoch (who contributes interesting discussions of telepathy, psychokinesis, and 'Religion and the Paranormal').

Nothing world-shattering here, but an enjoyable read all the same.

Isis

Goddess of Egypt & India

Chris Morgan

Mandrake of Oxford 2016

Pb, 255pp, illus, notes, ind, £14.99, ISBN 9781906958718



Linking Isis, the mother goddess of Egypt who was sister and wife to Osiris, to India is quite a provocative idea, but Chris Morgan makes a well-researched and interesting case for how the pan-Mediterranean cult of Isis came to the Malabar Coast of Kerala State, in southern India. Two thousand or more miles southwest of Egypt, across the Arabian Sea, is an ancient Hindu temple in what was the ancient trading port of Mueiris; today it is dedicated to Shiva and Kali but, asserts Morgan, there was a succession of dedications going back in time. Around the time of Christ there was a Græco-Roman merchant colony there, providing one strand of plausibility that Isis worship reached Indian shores.

One of the earliest resident deities was Pattini, revered by Buddhists, Jains and Hindus, whose gifts were fertility and health. The major legend of Pattini concerns

the ritual dismemberment of her husband and his subsequent resurrection. It was once thought this might be related to the cult of Attis but, according to Morgan it has more in common with Isis, patron of magic, and the fate of Osiris. He even presents the script of a Hindu drama from the modern stronghold of Pattini worship (in Sri Lanka) in which the death and rebirth are enacted, showing point for point that it is a "lost version" of a "passion play" about Isis and her murdered husband.

To add to the weirdness of this ancient temple, he describes members of various different cults turning up there around the Bharani festival, the rites of one ending in 12 hours of "misrule", and another of Kali devotees who dance to exhaustion with sickle-tipped swords and utter oracles in trances. There is also a legend of a secret temple below the Kerala building.

A fascinating story well told.

Conjuring Science

A History of Scientific Entertainment and Stage Magic in Modern France

Sophie Lachapelle

Palgrave Macmillan 2015

Hb, 201pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$95.00, ISBN 9781137497680



Sophie Lachapelle is a history professor at the University of Guelph, Canada, and this is an academic treatment of the social environment in 19th century France in which scientific performance and demonstration merged significantly with stage magic. She deconstructs accounts of the major scientists and magicians of the day and their presentations showing how each borrowed from the other and, in the process, imaginatively dissolved the boundaries between wonder and education imaginatively using misdirection and illusion. Excellent and instructive, but an eye-watering price.

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.



Elle

Dir Paul Verhoeven, France/Germany/Belgium 2016
On UK release from 10 March

Paul Verhoeven has never been one for tiptoeing around violence in his movies, and *Elle* is no exception. The film opens with its main character, successful businesswoman Michèle Leblanc (Isabelle Huppert), being raped in her home by a masked intruder. Once the rapist has left, she draws herself a bath and discards her clothes. As she sits silently in the tub, blood emerges through the foam of the bubble bath, and she nonchalantly rearranges the bubbles to hide the evidence of the ordeal she has just endured. Taking no time to recover, Michèle carries on with her life as usual; however, she is determined to fight back against her attacker. She not only fantasises about how the attack could have played out differently, she also buys various items for self-defence, and even commissions an employee to do some snooping for her. Thus the game of cat and mouse begins, and soon develops from obsession to perversion.

This being the first film Verhoeven has made since the acclaimed *Black Book* a decade ago, *Elle* has a lot of expectations riding on it. With his focus seemingly narrowing and intensifying as he gets

older, his first French language film is beautifully executed and immensely enjoyable. Having taken French lessons prior to filming to better communicate with the French cast and crew, Verhoeven shows his dedication in every scene, not only in the directorial polish of the whole but also in his grasp of the often overworked tropes of French cinema. And the tropes in *Elle* are many; Michèle is a brusque businesswoman; she is sleeping with her best friend's husband; she cannot stand her obnoxious daughter-in-law; and her oversexed mother is driving her mad with her young gigolo of a boyfriend – and that's just the tip of the iceberg. At several points in the film, these tropes are taken to the extreme, giving the film Verhoeven's trademark tinge of satire, and the result is delightful in all its absurdity. The acting is also exceptional, with Isabelle Huppert's portrayal of Michèle being mesmerisingly nuanced.

Whenever a film deals with rape there's justifiable concern as to whether the subject will be handled with sensationalism or respect. While chilling, the rape sequence here is handled in a manner that translates as unpleasantly realistic without becoming distastefully exploitative. Additionally, the main character pro-

cesses the ordeal in a relentlessly determined manner, which mirrors her general approach to life; she not only remains true to herself, but is anything but helpless when dealing with the aftermath of the assault. What's fascinating is the way this very determination to stay true to herself leads Michèle into a highly taboo perversion. While I will not reveal how that perversion develops and plays out, I will say that it is masterfully handled and should be recognised for the uncompromisingly artful piece of storytelling that it is.

It may sound paradoxical that a thriller about a woman looking to avenge her sexual assault is at the same time a satire on French cinema, but this is typical Verhoeven. His satire might have become less blatant over the years, but it's still there, and its subtle yet consistent presence in *Elle* is what elevates the film from a well-crafted thriller to a truly memorable movie. By balancing darkly humorous moments with an intense story of perversion and taboo, Verhoeven delivers a film that is as bold as it is entertaining.

Leyla Mikkelsen

The Love Witch

Dir Anna Biller, US 2016
On UK release from 10 March

Following the death of her husband, the police are paying young witch Elaine (Samantha Robinson) more attention than she cares for, so she ups sticks, relocates and is soon on the lookout for new love. Sustaining herself by making love potions and other amorous magical paraphernalia, she meets the handsome Wayne (Jeffrey Vincent Parise), who is immediately bewitched by her magnetic charms. However, after Elaine has used her magic to seduce him, Wayne starts experiencing some odd side effects, becoming highly emotional. Turned off by her lover's personality change, Elaine leaves Wayne in bed; but when she checks on him the following morning, he is dead. Struck by panic, she gets rid of his body and turns to magic for protection. Everything seems fine at first, but soon the police are onto Elaine, and her witchcraft is tested to the utmost when the charismatic detective Griff (Gian Keys) comes calling.

The Love Witch pays impressive homage to the colourful exploitation films of the early 1970s, while humorously riffing on the potentially problematic nature of those films with regard to feminism. Newcomer Samantha Robinson perfectly captures the quintessential Russ Meyer girl, looking and acting every bit the part of a purring sex kitten.

The visuals are also gorgeous, not least because the film was shot on 35mm, but also because every element of the set decoration and costumes perfectly captures the aesthetic of the time. This is all due to the *The Love Witch*'s creator, one-woman powerhouse Anna Biller, who has worn pretty much every single hat on this production: writer, director, producer, composer, production designer, art director, set decorator, costume designer and editor. It is evident from the result that Biller is a force to be reckoned with and that her film is a genuine labour of love, and the expert staging of the story leaves us in no doubt that she completely understands the genre and era she is paying tribute to.

Unfortunately, this level of passionate involvement in a project

Fortean Times Verdict

VERHOEVEN RETURNS WITH A DARKLY SATIRICAL THRILLER

9

can also lead to a film maker failing to scrutinise her own work with any degree of objectivity. While *The Love Witch* is a visually stunning piece of cinema, it's obvious that Biller the director has found it very difficult to act as editor of her own work. With a duration of two hours, the film runs a good 30 minutes too long and is in dire need of cutting. After about an hour, the picture grinds to a halt, its second half often dragging along at a pace where the narrative becomes unclear. Scenes that do nothing to further the plot are left to meander on without a clear sense of direction, and this unfortunately manages to disconnect the audience from the film and negate much of the effort that has been made to transport us back to a different cinematic world.

It may be stylistically impressive, but while *The Love Witch* successfully recreates the visuals of vintage Russ Meyer, its obvious references to Romero's *Season of the Witch* serve only to show that Biller's film never quite attains the intriguing power of that Seventies gem.

Leyla Mikkelsen

Fortean Times Verdict

RETRO PASSION PROJECT IS STUNNING BUT OVERLONG

7

The Chamber

Dir Ben Parker, UK 2016

On UK release from 10 March

A research vessel in North Korean waters gets boarded by American Special Ops who requisition the vessel's small submersible for a secret mission. Said submarine is a bit temperamental, so the team (Charlotte Salt, James McArdle and Elliot Levey) also take its regular pilot (Johannes Kuhnke) along with them. As they begin their descent into the abyss of the Yellow Sea, the disgruntled pilot tries to learn what the trio are up to, but their lips remain sealed. As tensions rise and things come to a head, the four find themselves trapped at the bottom of the ocean, and soon military protocol and personal differences must be put aside if they want to survive.

For a British film with such a small budget (it was shot in

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth **REVEREND PETER LAWS** dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

GHOSTS OF MARS

Dir John Carpenter, US 2001
Powerhouse Films, £14.99 (Dual format)

VAMPIRES

Dir John Carpenter, US 1998
Powerhouse Films, £14.99 (Dual format)

I'd better 'fess up straight away: I'm a John Carpenter fanboy. I love his stuff to the point of creepy obsession. Last October, I even got to see him play live in London at the Troxy. I was 10 feet away as he pounded out the themes to *Christine* and *The Fog*. I listened to my iPhone video clips of it and I can hear myself whooping out "hell yeahs" like a quivering *Price is Right* contestant. It was embarrassing, but impossible to control. You need to know this fact for balance, as it means I can be overly generous to some of his less celebrated works. Like *Ghosts of Mars*, for example.

Most critics think it's a turd, a bona fide piece of crud. The *New York Times* described it as "a zombie picture directed by one of the undead", and Mr Showbiz opined that it was "so wretched that it practically defies description". I, however, think it's a bit of a hoot. Yes, it's pretty brainless, and makes you feel as if you're looking into the mind of a seven-year-old boy playing with action figures in a

sand pit and doing whatever the heck he thinks would look cool; but this means you get Ice Cube, Jason Statham and Natasha Henstridge spitting out ridiculously macho lines on a matriarchal Mars that is infested with ancient Martian spirits who possess humans and make them rip Pam Grier's head clean off and shove it on a spike. And Carpenter swaps his usual synth soundtrack for head-pounding Anthrax guitars. Is it one of Carpenter's best? Ha ha! No. But it is an amphetamine-fuelled mash-up of *Assault on Precinct 13*, *The Thing* and *Prince of Darkness* relocated to the Red Planet. What's not to like? Watch out for the very final moment too. It's one of the only times I've ever seen Carpenter break the fourth wall. The grown-up in me thought this was cheesy, and that it affected the internal logic and integrity of the movie... but the seven-year-old boy inside of me thought it was amazeballs.

Also released on Blu-ray is *Vampires*, which I like a little less, even though it's the more accomplished of the two films. Here, James Woods treks across the desert, wiping out nests of leather-clad vampires, including Laura Palmer from *Twin Peaks*, whose bite on the thigh makes her gurn at the camera a lot. There's a nice thread about the



vampire hunters working alongside the clergy to track down the undead menace, and it's filled with dusty, sunset shots that often look a lot like Mars. Considering these two films followed each other, they definitely count as Carpenter's 'red period'. Some might prefer to call it his dead period, suggesting that he'd lost his directorial mojo by this point. It's true, I much prefer his earlier works, but there's still something wild and delicious about the films Carpenter makes – even the so-called turkeys.

Fortean Times Verdict

TWO LESS-CELEBRATED WORKS FROM CARPENTER'S RED PERIOD

7



Wales, not North Korea) and such a static setting, *The Chamber* achieves quite a lot in spite of its limitations. The cinematography effectively establishes the claustrophobic atmosphere of the confined space, and the performances are for the most part engaging. Johannes Kuhnke and Charlotte Salt play their parts particularly well, despite the fact that they have been given very little to work with, both in terms of setting and script. The plot provides only the most basic of frameworks, and while it is commendable that momentum is maintained throughout the film, the script is ultimately devoid of any real depth or substance.

As a survival thriller, the premise and narrative structure of *The Chamber* work well enough, but in the end the film is no more than a disposable bit of entertainment.

Leyla Mikkelsen

Fortean Times Verdict

EFFECTIVE IF UNEXCEPTIONAL
SURVIVAL THRILLER

6

Personal Shopper

Dir Olivier Assayas, France/Germany 2016

On UK release from 17 March

Maureen (Kristen Stewart) is personal shopper for demanding, megafamous, trend-setting celebrity Kyra (Nora van Waldstatten). Dashing around Paris and London, choosing and collecting clothes and accessories, Maureen is the de facto standard for her client, employed because she knows Kyra's taste and how to make her look good. But Maureen is dissatisfied, not just with her job but with her life; she is mourning the death of her twin brother who passed away some weeks before from a heart condition. Like him, Maureen reckons herself to be a medium, a spiritualist in touch with a world beyond our own. Holding to a pact made with her brother, Maureen is waiting for a sign from him to prove there is life after death.

Director Olivier Assayas presents for our consideration a series of dualities: haves and have-nots, on the most basic level; personal and public; sophistication and naiveté; body and soul; and the biggie – life and death. They are presented through visual oppositions: swanky penthouse flat versus old dark

house; city versus country; fashionable versus scuzzy; and, ultimately, clothed versus naked. All of this is bundled together in a package that is itself a clash between two film genres: glossy thriller and gothic horror. These contrasts are pulled together with skill, and the opposites meld into each other rather than jarring.

An intriguing aesthetic then, and in service to an equally intriguing structure; however, the film has some serious flaws which conspire to render it a failure. Foremost among these is Kristen Stewart's performance as Maureen. Stewart has undeniable star quality, but at this stage of her career she simply does not have the acting chops to carry a film, particularly one as intense as this, without heavyweight support to help her out. Maureen is at best a rootless character, at worst someone who is losing her mind, but Stewart plays it all with the same collection of shrugs, stammers and furrowed brows. For a film that rarely has her off screen, it's a fatal flaw. The dialogue is often banal and on occasion risible; describing her encounter with a malign female apparition, Maureen says: "She vomited some ectoplasm and left." There is a lengthy, crucial section of the film where Maureen is plagued by text messages, which may or may not be coming from the beyond. Technology means that sequences like this are perforce creeping into cinema, but sending and receiving texts is hardly cinematic stuff.

There are moments when Assayas's skill as a technician shines through: such as when Maureen's inbox fills with messages, each of which indicates her stalker is getting closer and closer, and a remarkable glide out of a hotel elevator, through the lobby and out into the street. Both sequences recall Hitchcock at his best, and I imagine he would have had a field day with this material. Sadly, such moments are too infrequent to rescue the film; the idea might have been to set up an opposition between 21st century thriller and 19th century Gothic chiller, but this offers little of either.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

MORE LIKE RATNERS THAN
CARTIER UNFORTUNATELY

6

SHORTS

BRUCE LEE: THE MASTER COLLECTION

Mediumrare, £34.99 (Blu-ray)



At last we have a done-in-one, six-disc Blu-ray set collecting all of the Little Dragon's beloved feature films (including *Enter the Dragon*, excluded from the otherwise comprehensive Hong Kong Legends 30th Anniversary Commemorative Edition of 2003 but licensed from Warner Bros for this release).

First up, we get Lee's rough-and-ready debut in *The Big Boss* (1971), then the fully-fledged masterpiece that is *Fist of Fury* (1972). Both films look magnificent in eye-popping new 4K transfers that bring these mash-ups of nationalist sentiment, broad comedy and martial arts to fresh life. Lee's directorial debut, *Way of the Dragon* (1972), another new master, is perhaps less of an upgrade from the previous version, but still astonishes with some of the best fight sequences ever committed to celluloid, including the climactic confrontation with Chuck Norris in Rome's Colosseum. Lee's final completed work was his international break-out *Enter the Dragon* (1973), which remains an odd but irresistible mixture of Hong Kong and Western styles with some fantastic set pieces. Finally, we get a 4K master of the unfinished *Game of Death* (1978), a desperate bit of cinematic grave-robbing that stitched together the small amount of footage Lee had completed with sequences featuring various look (not very) alike and even newsreel of Lee's funeral! This set ports over all the extras from the old HKL releases, providing hour upon hour of documentaries, interviews, extra footage and commentaries, and offers options for English, Mandarin and Cantonese audio. An essential celebration of a brilliant and tragically brief career. **DS 9/10**

WAR ON EVERYONE



Icon Entertainment, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £10.99 (DVD)

This black comedy about two corrupt cops (Alexander Skarsgård and Michael Peña) leaving a trail of mayhem across New Mexico inexplicably garnered a string of good reviews. Despite the talent in front of the cameras, even the normally wonderful Peña can't do much with this glib, nasty and nihilistic material, courtesy of Brit writer/director John Michael McDonagh, whose script comes across like a long-forgotten cast-off found at the back of Quentin Tarantino's sock drawer. The results are unfunny, boorish and painfully flat. **DS 4/10**

STIGMATA

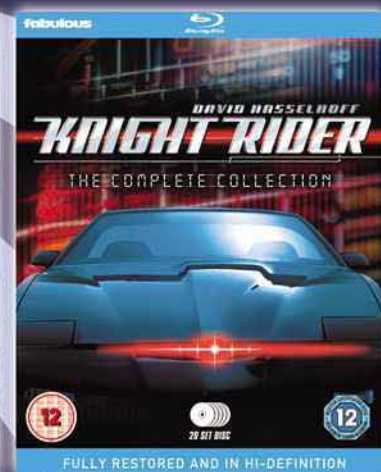
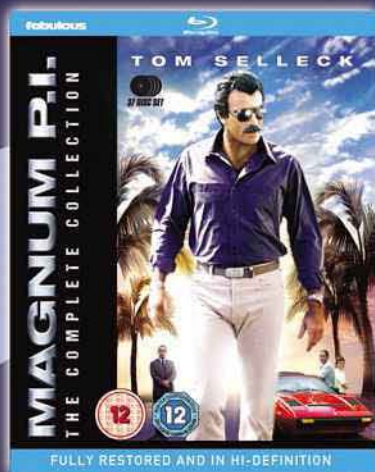
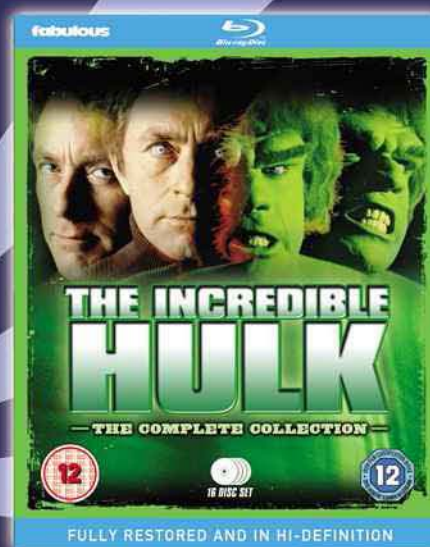
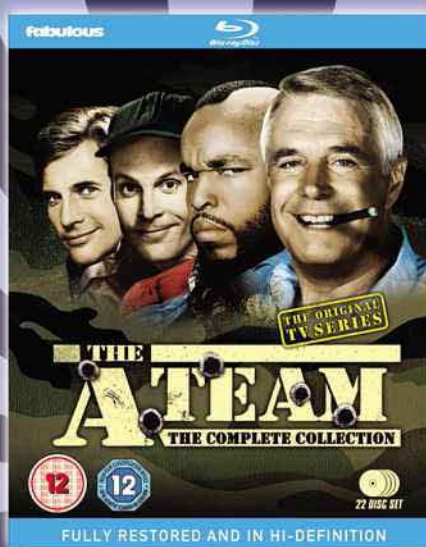


Eureka Entertainment, £14.99 (Dual Format)

Holy Moly! A hedonistic hairdresser gets the religious 'gift' of bleeding over everybody while her priest lover uncovers a Catholic conspiracy to bury the true words of Christ! Released in 1999, *Stigmata* was perfectly timed to explore the jumpy spiritual atmosphere of the millennium. Sadly, it means it's also very much a product of the 1990s: it looks like an over-styled music promo, with more religious iconography and slow-motion doves than a Madonna video. Some people love this kind of stuff, of course, and the film has its hardcore fans. Me though? Not so much. It's still an interesting pre-*Da Vinci Code* dip into all those conspiracy theories that the established church might be hiding the source of true spirituality, but as an anti-Church horror movie, it ironically ends up being a bit too sanctimonious and preachy.

PL 5/10

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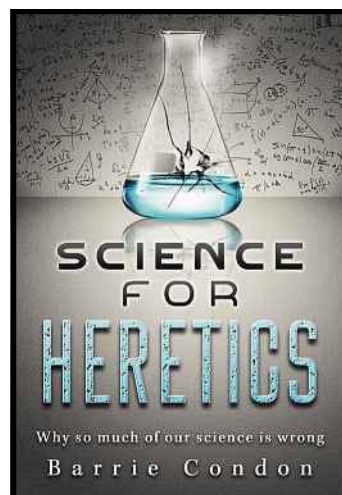


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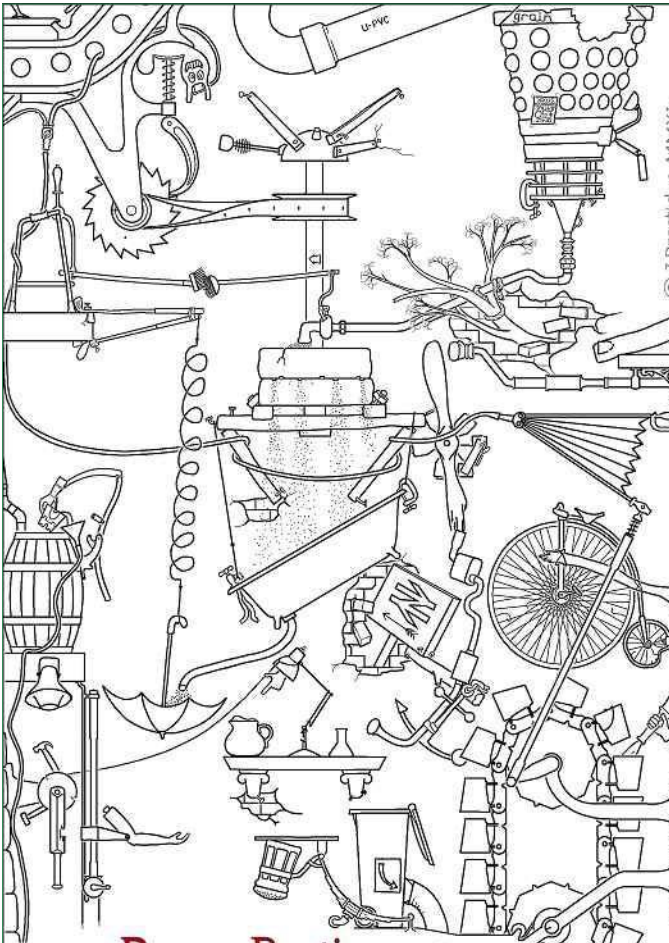
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Dear FT...

letters



Mysterious skin

Stu Ferrol's Forum piece "Stranger, darker things" [FT347:58-59] touched on American conspiracies of children abducted for psychic experiments by the military. He linked them with Operation Yewtree in the UK, which has been investigating child abuse cover-ups in establishment institutions. Could these rumours, or memories of UFO abductions generally, be linked to repressed trauma of sexual assault? Readers interested in this story might enjoy Gregg Araki's film *Mysterious Skin* (2004), a coming-of-age story about childhood sexual assault and aliens. It's an exceptional film, harrowing at times, but very watchable – and will be thought provocative for ufologists.

Emily Monaghan
 London

Catholic ghosts

Regarding foreign ghosts [FT347:74]: it's always been my take that there are far fewer ghost stories in Catholic countries than in Protestant ones, angels or demons being the preferred explanation – but it's clearly a grey area... One of my punk poems back in the 1980s ended: "The past flies out of the marble / wherever you happen to strike it / but there are no ghosts in Italy / and that's the way they like it". I was prompted by a friend's observation, while living near Rome, that she had heard of an abandoned country villa with a reputation for being haunted, and how very unusual that was.

Janet Wilson
 Bristol

Aerial music

Further to audio phenomena in Canada [FT349:10]: in 2012 strange sounds were recorded in the vicinity of North Battleford, Saskatchewan, and later featured on BBC 2's *Nature's Weirdest Events*. They resembled avant-garde electric guitar, as though Jimi Hendrix were making a comeback with the Neil Young of Arc and Fred Frith



Aerial imposter

This photo was taken by my colleague Mo Ali Tighsazzadeh on his iPhone 6. He didn't notice anything odd in the sky at the time...

Kris Hall, School Principal By email

Editor's note: most readers will recognise this as the reflection of an interior electric light fitting. Still, it makes a classic 'flying saucer', doesn't it?

of Henry Cow. Appealing as that scenario is, the cause was probably distant industrial noise distorted by a temperature inversion.

• Simon Young's column on the gnomes of Wollaton Park [FT348:23] reminded me of another sighting involving primary school age children, the Little Blue Man of Studham. This case, I believe, can be attributed to blue ball lightning, as Theo Paijmans [FT339:56-57] presents ample evidence of unusual atmospheric conditions. The glowing entity, with its long split beard, has more in common with a garden gnome than an extraterrestrial: did familiarity with these ornaments influence the children's hallucination (for want of a better word)?

Richard George
 St Albans, Hertfordshire

Caffeine dependence

Regarding the idea that a hot drink will cool you down on a hot day [Mythconceptions, FT350:23]: I always had an alternative explanation for the phenomenon. The hot drink in question is usu-

ally tea or coffee, both of which contain caffeine, an addictive drug. I would suggest that either the imbiber is mistaking the comfort of withdrawal symptoms disappearing for the comfort of a more reasonable temperature; or, much more likely, the standard explanation is an alternative to conversations like this. Child: "Daddy, why are you drinking a hot drink when it is so hot?" Father: "Because daddy is a drug addict and needs his withdrawal headache to go away".

David Staveley
 Eastbourne, East Sussex

Cold-blooded

According to a Sideline [FT349:11], a missing tortoise called Zuma was found using a thermal imaging camera. This reminds me of the 'Komodo capers' [FT178:9] where we were told about Lebanese forces hunting a Komodo dragon with infrared goggles. In both cases, reptiles, being cold-blooded, would have the same temperature as the surroundings and would not show up in infrared.

Nils Erik Grande
 Oslo, Norway

Saucer-shaped

Jenny Randles makes the interesting point that the word 'saucer', used commonly to describe the appearance of UFOs, started out as a term to describe their movement [FT349:27]. This naturally implies that if the appearance of UFOs as 'saucer-like' followed from this, then there was a sense of our seeing or saying we had seen something that came about as a mistake or misinterpretation of what was 'really there'. Did the common idea of a UFO stem from a mistake? An unusual problem that begs further thought.

Whilst this is a natural and arguable conclusion, there are other interpretations that deserve consideration. Firstly that it is possible that by coincidence UFOs *do* look like saucers, which is why the word acquired its longevity; and secondly, perhaps the movement of the original crescent-shaped craft that were described as saucers requires craft to be saucer-shaped too. This is a case of which came first, the chicken or the egg? Did the word 'saucer' inform our perceptions or are we seeing something that is really saucer-shaped? I suspect we are seeing both chicken and egg.

• Alice Hepple is concerned that a dream she had was both trying to kill her and rescue her [FT347:77]. The dream occurring whilst she has a severe asthma attack represents one side of her attempting to keep her asleep whilst the other side wakes her up. Fortunately, the truth is much more likely to be healthier than that. What she felt with regard to feeling restrained by the dream is I suspect sleep paralysis: whenever we sleep the body goes into a state of mild paralysis so as not to act out thoughts that we might dream. This is to enable it to rest and is why it was so difficult to wake up despite being aware of the need to do so. Ms Hepple's dreams only had one moral side: the one that urged her to awaken.

Simon van Someren
 London

More on Montague Summers

I enjoyed Brian Regal's feature on the Reverend Montague Summers [FT349:42-46], with its use of unpublished letters to publishers. But the overall angle – that Summers had no real dabbling with the occult, and the only 'occult' (punning on hidden, or supposedly lesser known) aspect of his life was his career as a writer – is not entirely satisfying. Firstly, if there was anything hidden about Summers's career as a hard-working scholarly and hack writer then it was hidden in very full view indeed, with some 25 books and booklets including such major works as *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*, *The Vampire in Europe*, *The Gothic Quest*, and *A Gothic Bibliography*, along with a couple of hundred contributions to periodicals.

Furthermore, Summers's knowledge of the Black Mass seems to have been more than scholarly. "Real" Black Masses are like friend-of-a-friend stories, and the more they are examined (rumoured in Paris... rumoured in Belgium...) the more they evaporate. AE Waite's sensationally titled investigation *Devil Worship in France* (1896) expended over 300 careful pages in finding that actually there wasn't any, which may have disappointed some readers. As for Britain, the first true Black Mass for which there is any real evidence took place later than you might imagine, on Boxing Day 1918 (in Eton Road, Hampstead); and the depraved clergyman conducting it was none other than – Montague Summers.

The details can be found in Timothy d'Arch Smith's *The Books of the Beast* (Mandrake, 1991). Smith's thesis is that the later fire-and-brimstone condemnations of witchcraft and Satanism for which Summers is remembered had their origin in Summers's horrified revulsion at his earlier career. As Tim splendidly puts it, he suffered "some sort of psychic kick-back", and "discovered (not a moment too soon) that the god he worshipped and the god who warred against that god were professionals."

Phil Baker
London



Mewstone cloned

I took this photo on 12 November 2016 at the coast in Wembury in Devon. I was snapping a few shots of the sun going down over the sea and the Mewstone (the big rock in the sea) when I noticed the Sun and the hole in the cloud had created a second, glowing Mewstone (sadly, quite burned out in my shot here, but the best I got). Very pretty, and quite odd and unexpected.

Lorna Stroup Nilsson, Princetown, Devon

Very nice to see a picture of Montague Summers's gravestone [FT349:46], which I was involved in erecting many years ago with my colleague Edwin Pouncey. Montie didn't write a *Life of Dryden*, though he did edit an edition of his plays. As to his involvement in the occult, his biographer Timothy d'Arch Smith met an old actor using the stage name Anatole James, who gave details of a Black Mass Montie conducted at which he and a Catholic youth called Sullivan were present, along with Montie's pet dog.

James also recalled how he and Summers, who was "made up to the eyes and reeking of scent" (d'Arch Smith, p.44) went out in search of companions, young Catholic lads being Summers's prey. Tim was convinced by this testimony and so am I. If you examine Summers's book of poems, *Antinous*, it is very much decadent and Satanist in nature and completely at odds with his later work. Ambivalent? Enigmatic certainly. Gay definitely.

Sandy Robertson
By email

Brian Regal's article usefully discusses Summers's trials as a working author, but fails to convey the extreme

murkiness of his life. I'll give two examples. First, the question of Summers's orders in the Catholic Church is extremely obscure and opens fascinating byways among the *episcopi vagantes* (independent bishops) and Anglo-Catholic underworld of the early 20th century. Second, when Summers was involved in the 1908 pederasty scandal, why was the clergyman accused with him sent to prison, while Summers seems to have escaped prosecution? There was a lot more going on in Summers's life than Regal suggests.

Bob Emery
Albany, NY

Editor's note: An informed source tells us that the clergyman accused with Summers was Austin Pemberton Nelson, whom he probably met at Lichfield Theological College. He was born in 1876 and ordained in 1905. At Taunton Assizes in 1910 he was sentenced to 18 months' hard labour for "a grave offence" on 18 October 1909, with a youth, Septimus Bailey (14), son of Samuel Bailey, lamplighter. He was sent to Shepton Mallet prison.

Septimus may have been a fishmonger's errand boy (he certainly was in 1911). Perhaps Summers found him a little too high-smelling for dalliance.

Mythical sandwich

I was much bemused by the episode with Gavrilo Princip having a sandwich before being interrupted, causing World War I [Myth-chaser, FT349:23]. I have written a book on the outbreak of that war (published in Sweden in 2014) and faintly remember coming across that sandwich every now and then; though I have never given much thought to it, and happily didn't include it in the book.

Because yes, it is a myth. In a 2011 article <www.smithsonian-mag.com/history/gavrilo-princip-sandwich-79480741/> Mike Dash [erstwhile Gang of Fort member] debunks it as well as one could wish, showing that not only is it not true, but also not very likely, as sandwiches weren't common street food in Sarajevo in 1914. Dash traces its origin to *Twelve Fingers*, a 2001 novel in Portuguese, and shows how it became widespread and, most interestingly, *why* it became widespread.

The idea that had he not taken that sandwich, WWI & WWII would never have happened isn't true, with or without a sandwich. That he managed to kill Franz Ferdinand was actually quite unlikely: he was a bad shot, and a single bullet certainly doesn't have to be lethal even when it hits home. And even with the Archduke alive, the political situation was such that war would have broken out in 1915, 1916 or perhaps even later; it was just waiting to happen.

Discussing the debunked myth of Princip's sandwich, a friend pointed out an older similar micromyth: Princip's coffee. "The driver stopped and backed laboriously on to the quay, close to the café in which sat Gavrilo Princip, sipping his coffee. He heard the grinding of gears. He looked up to see the Archduke in his car which had come to a halt not more than six feet away." (Rupert Furneaux, *Great Dramatic Stories of the Twentieth Century*, Odhams 1966, p.46.) I don't think this one ever took off. The idea of the would-be assassin scrambling out from the café is hard to swallow; the sandwich permits him to stand on the street outside, where all agree he stood when shooting the Archduke.

Peter Olausson
Gothenburg, Sweden



Fall from the Wall

Theo Paijmans's article about spontaneous human levitation [FT349:28] made me recall a Swedish case of a badly frightened child momentarily levitating – or whatever he did. The child was Frans Gunnar Bengtsson (1894–1954) who grew up to become a popular essayist and author of the epic Viking novel *Röde Orm* (published by Harper as *The Long Ships*). In chapter six of his 1953 memoir *Den lustgård som jag minns* (*The Paradise Which I Remember*), Bengtsson writes: "Once, and only once in my life, have I experienced something which for me is impossible to explain. When it happened I could only have been between five and six years old. All our memories are unreliable and I am perfectly willing to admit that the memories of a five-year-old are not to be trusted at all. I only tell this story because I am myself absolutely convinced that it happened..."

Bengtsson goes on to describe the country estate Rössjöholm in southern Sweden, where he grew up as the only child of the foreman, and a new brick wall that had been built between the stables and a dairy there. It was a 3m (10ft) high wall that he managed to climb one summer day, alone at the farm apart from two bricklayers who were working over at the stables and paying no attention to him. On top of the wall, little Frans stood up and did an ill-advised victory jig to celebrate his climbing feat, ignoring what have must have been quite a large height for a child. He writes:

"Suddenly I lost my balance and fell backwards. I couldn't regain my footing by taking a quick step somewhere, because the wall was narrow and behind me there was only air... During a long and horrible moment I knew that I was going to fall and hit the stones far below. But I didn't fall. I had only time to begin the fall, with my arms waving helplessly in the air and my feet more or less still connected to the top of the wall – but an accident never happened.

"Something stopped my fall, something caught me. I felt this clearly. It wasn't like a hand, it was something large and soft that pressed against my shoulder blades. And suddenly I was stand-

ing upright again, with my balance regained, although nothing or no one was near me... I couldn't fathom what just had happened, and I became frightened – far more frightened than I have ever become, either before or after that day.

"I clearly remember what I did afterwards. I climbed down from the wall to the ground as fast as I could and went home; I went straight up to our attic, locked the door behind me and went over to a corner where mattresses and old clothes and rubbish had been stored. I lay down and just stayed there, shivering and chattering my teeth, overwhelmed by sheer horror. It wasn't the horror of just having avoided falling and breaking my neck, or even some sort of religious horror. It was worse than that: the horror of experiencing the totally inexplicable."

Johan Theorin
Stockholm, Sweden

Classical strumpets

Thanks to Richard George for his kind compliment and well-thought-out remarks [FT349:69]. Herewith, a few addenda to my Strumpeting: I deliberately left out Sthenelais and many other ladies from the *Greek Anthology*, wishing to give space to real-life ones; these others are usually thought to be poetic fictions. The Greek verb Paton translates at the end of verse two does indeed mean 'breathing out'. However, in the authoritative modern edition of Hermann Beckby, there is a different textual reading. Instead of *ereugomenen* (Paton), Becky has *ameregomenen* meaning "to squeeze out". This eliminates the issue of gold and its smell, and much better suits the poem as a whole. Its point is that whoever wrote it (yes, could be Macedonius, though Marcus Argentarius and Rufinus – my own preference – have been canvassed – plenty of other *Anthology* erotocists are just as possible) is boasting that the girl grants him her favours for nothing, whereas others who want her have to pay; she squeezes out gold from these clients.

William Roger Paton is something of a mystery. Biographical details are available in his *Dictionary of British Classicists* entry. Al-

though married with children, he mixed with such raffish characters as Oscar Wilde and the notorious pæderast Oscar Browning, from whom he might well have learned the ins and outs of refined sexual practices: the year 1916 does not imply innocence of such matters. As to Martial's *Philaenis* (also the name of the author of an ancient sex manual), yes, she might have used a dildo. On the other hand, various websites claim enormously enlarged clitorises – at least one is on display at YouTube. Regarding Suillius Caesoninus, I see nothing specific in Tacitus's Latin to indicate that he had a sexual encounter with Messalina. There were other men present at her orgy, any one of whom could have buggered him.

Barry Baldwin
Calgary, Alberta

Saunière's wealth

I think that I can clarify some of the points raised in Geoff Clifton's letter [FT348:69], using information provided by Luc Farin-Gélis in his 2011 book *Le trésor du diable de Rennes-le-Château*.

Firstly, Saunière did not come from "a very impoverished background". His father was the manager of a factory and a landowner, and some of Saunière's income was from a family vineyard. Among his other sources of income were grants from the municipality, funding from far-flung royalist sources, the sale of (very expensive) postcards, and – yes – the sale of Masses.

Secondly, the sale of Masses was not forbidden by the Church, but recognised as a legitimate source of income for poorer priests. However, the maximum permitted was three Masses per day. Anything above that was supposed to be passed on for other priests to say. What Saunière appears to have done is to have sold Masses by mail order on an industrial scale and then not have said them or to have had them said.

From the point of

view of Catholic theology, this was a scandal. Masses were said for the forgiveness of the purchaser's sins, or for those of a dead relative. By not saying them, Saunière was placing souls in jeopardy. It was for this reason that he was finally charged with simony.

Saunière effectively defied his condemnation for simony and returned to Rennes where, on 5 January 1917, he signed the order for public works totalling eight million francs (the equivalent of two billion francs at the end of the 20th century). It was not clear whether he signed contracts or merely approved quotations; but in any case he died on 22 January.

He had previously carried out various works in the village; but he had always placed these in the name of his housekeeper, who was also his heir. She lived the rest of her life in poverty, unable even to keep up the gardens that Saunière had commissioned. This suggests to me that Saunière was never as rich as he claimed to be; that the funding for his previous works had been hand-to-mouth; and that he knew that, in the event of default on the funding, his housekeeper, not himself, would be legally liable. Far from being a multi-millionaire, when he signed in January 1917 he did not have the money to pay for his grandiose schemes.

There is little doubt that Saunière was a con artist. His most successful con may have been that after his death he convinced a number of researchers that he was many times wealthier than he actually was.

Martin Jenkins
London



"Notice anything strange about that chap?"

TONY HUSBAND

letters

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This visage greeted Steve Scanlon from a crumpled blanket on his couch as he walked out of his studio.



Sheena Phillips noticed an apprehensive face as she was about to pick up a towel from the floor.



Richard McQuillan photographed this surf-weathered beach rock at La Jolla Cove in California. He saw it as a reposing alien. "Note the right arm," he writes, "including the hand clenched into a fist."



When John Webb discarded his dressing gown on the bathroom floor, he noticed that its folds and creases had formed into a face.

First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

TALES FROM THE CLASSROOM...

Neil Powney, an English teacher at De La Salle Roman Catholic School in Basildon, Essex, often uses bits of *Fortean Times* in his class. In particular, his pupils love *Sidelines*. His Year 8 class, aged 12 and 13, said they would like to have a go at writing some "It happened to me" letters, relating strange experiences. Out of 31 entries we chose the following seven.

The Gang of Fort would like to encourage *FT*-reading school teachers to get their classes writing their own accounts of strange phenomena that had happened either to them or to someone in their family – an enjoyable way of practising English composition.

In November 2015 my nan died of cervical cancer and my family decided to cremate her and keep the ashes in our house. In February my father and I were talking about my nan in the kitchen when the door opened and then about three seconds later closed again as if somebody had walked in. We thought nothing of it until it happened again some time later, but this time in my bedroom, the day before the anniversary of my nan's death. I was on my bed when I could have sworn I heard my name being called from downstairs, where my nan's ashes are. I asked my mum and dad if they had called me, but both said no. Nobody else was in the house.

My dad then told me about what happened to my great grandmother when her husband died. My great granddad fought in World War II and when he returned to his home in Billericay, Essex, he was afraid of the dark and slept with the lights on. For 17 years this was how my great granddad and his wife slept until he died, and like my dad, she kept his ashes at home. In the middle of the night before the anniversary of my great granddad's death, my great grandmother, two great aunts and my nan woke up to find all the lights on in the bedroom, hallway and bathroom. Nobody else was in the house. There seemed only one explanation – my great granddad did it.

Ruby Shayler (13)

One evening in about 1950 my granddad went out with friends to a local pub in Upminster [a suburb in east London]. He became extremely drunk and decided to leave his car and walk back to his flat. He found the front door wide open. He cautiously walked in but

nobody was there. Then he found a bloody hammer lying on the floor in the front room. In his drunk state he opened the window and threw it out.

About 20 years later he returned to Upminster on a day out with the family. They took a short cut to avoid a big crowd of people. The family ventured through a dark alley where he found a bloody hammer lying behind a bin! My granddad was so creeped out that he said nothing about it till now.

Harry Pace (13)

When my mum's granddad died, her nan asked her to choose a rose bush with her in remembrance of him. At the garden centre they looked for a special rose that not

only looked beautiful but smelled lovely too. After much searching, they were about to give up when my mum felt a cold chill and a tap on her shoulder. She turned round expecting to find someone behind her, but instead found a rose bush that she hadn't seen before. It was just the type of rose they were looking for. My mum said she felt her granddad was with her at that moment.

Lauren Churcher (12)

One cold evening in the winter of 2012, I was waiting with my mum and my brother for an overground train at West Ham Station in London. We were returning from my great aunt's flat in Shoreditch. I heard heavy panting coming from the stairwell and thought it must be a commuter in a hurry. The panting stopped and I turned round to see a 'man' glide silently past me. I was in complete shock and tried to persuade myself that my imagination was playing tricks on me. Then I heard the rumbling of the train coming into the station and stood up ready to board, when the 'man' appeared in front of me. I could see the train through him and his transparent organs alongside the see-through West Ham top and skinny jeans. I turned to see whether

my mum or my brother had seen him, but they didn't have the same flabbergasted expression as I did. We boarded the train with no further sighting of the 'man'.

Isabel Russell (12)

In 2014 my cousin and I were both 10 and I was staying round at her house. At 3am we were in her room playing with her tablet when we heard kitchen cupboards opening and banging shut. Everyone in the house was upstairs asleep so we rushed down to the kitchen to see what was going on. No one was there. The kitchen cupboards were closed and looked untouched. However, as we walked out, the kettle switch flicked (although it was unplugged) and a chair screeched across the floor. We sprinted upstairs to my cousin's room, where we hid and didn't get any sleep whatsoever. In the afternoon we walked to the shop. As we turned back we spotted something that seemed like a breath on the window, but no one was in the kitchen.

Lauren Stevens (12)

A friend of my mother's got married in 1992, aged about 32. Her husband just turned 40 when he was diagnosed with leukaemia, and he died two years later. A week after that was his widow's birthday, when she had a get-together with her family and took a few photos. When these were developed, one showed her late husband beside her. He didn't look real – he was almost completely transparent.

Katie Finch (12)

In 2010, when I was six, there were many strange occurrences in our house. The previous owners had passed away in the house, and we had only been living there for three months. One cold and stormy night there was banging on the window, which kept me awake, but eventually I fell asleep. I awoke in the middle of the night to see a strange figure standing over me. I turned over and tried not to think about it. Soon after there was breathing on my neck, so I got up and switched on the light. As I turned round my door slammed. There was nothing there. It still scares me to this day.

Jess Palmer (12)



POLICE THE ILLUSTRATED LAW COURTS AND WEEK

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

55. THE LICHFIELD YEOMANRY OUTRAGES

The Queen's Own Royal Staffordshire Yeomanry was one of several volunteer regiments raised in 1794 to repel foreign invasion. As we know, Napoleon never carried out a full-scale invasion of Britain, but the Staffordshire Yeomanry remained for many decades to come: a volunteer cavalry regiment run according to archaic and feudal standards by the local nobility and gentry.

In June 1884, the Staffordshire Yeomanry went to Lichfield for its summer meeting, led by their Colonel, the wealthy magnate William Bromley-Davenport, MP. He was 63 years old and had never seen active military service in his life, but was still popular and respected, and known as the 'Father of the Regiment' for his long service. The Marquis of Anglesey was the Lieutenant-Colonel of the

Staffordshire Yeomanry, and the Marquis of Stafford, Sir CM Wolseley, and other members of the aristocracy and gentry served as officers. The problem was that these officers had little authority over the men, some of whom were irresponsible youngsters of a giddy and mischief-loving disposition.

There was instant dislike between the Lichfield townsmen and the Yeomanry. The soldiers were rude and insulting, and the local police had no authority over them. Discipline was non-existent, and the troops were up to all kinds of mischief in town. When a party of officers attended a performance of Gilbert & Sullivan's *Queen Ida* by Mr d'Oiley Carte's theatrical ensemble, they behaved very obnoxiously, shouting and yahoing, and 'improving' the play with various coarse jokes. When the theatrical manager objected to this outrage, two of the officers frog-marched him to an upstairs room and locked him in. The officers then charged the stage, putting 'Queen Ida' and her fellow thespians to

headlong flight.

In the meantime, troops of soldiers from the Staffordshire Yeomanry made their presence felt in Lichfield, drinking and carousing. Several public houses had extended their opening hours to accommodate the soldiery, and the unwisdom of this soon became apparent. Fights broke out, and one soldier leapt onto a cart, pulled the driver's hat down over his eyes, and shoved him off the box. The soldiers then cut one of the horses loose, and one of them rode off on it. Another soldier, who had been knocked down by one of the enraged locals, was arrested by a party of police constables, but the other troopers charged the police and liberated their comrade in arms. Several constables were knocked down, and had their trousers pulled off. The young officers who had just put an end to the performance of *Queen Ida* had an even better idea, however: would it not be capital fun to deface the statue of Lichfield's most famous son, Dr



ABOVE: The yeomanry officers assault Dr Johnson's statue in Lichfield, and other incidents from the riots, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 28 June 1884.

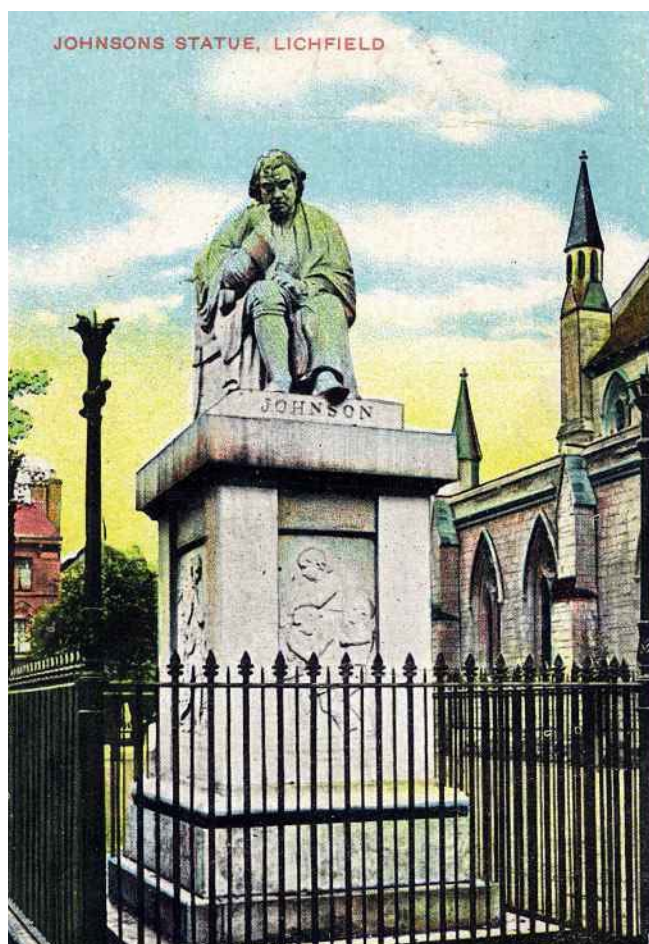
ILLUSTRATED NEWS

WEEKLY RECORD

Samuel Johnson?

The statue of the great lexicographer at Market Square in Lichfield had been erected in 1838, on a tall plinth with railings to protect it from vandals. But the officers got hold of a long ladder and a large bottle of 'Nubian Black', which they made use of to blacken Dr Johnson's face. Major Graves had alerted Colonel Bromley-Davenport to his officers and soldiers running riot in town, and the elderly officer came up to plead with the soldiers to return to their makeshift barracks. They did not obey him, however, and the major shortly after saw the hapless colonel lurch off towards Yeomanry House; on his way there, he dropped dead in the street.

There was consternation among both the military and civilian inhabitants of Lichfield at Colonel Bromley-Davenport's unexpected demise. At first, it was thought that one of the enraged locals had murdered him, but Major Graves had seen no other person nearby, and the colonel had been unwell with heart disease for some time. At the inquest, a verdict of death from natural causes was returned. The verdict of the press on the Lichfield Yeomanry Outrages was a more severe one, however. In spite of acrid soaps and bristly brushes being applied to Dr Johnson's face, the application of 'Nubian Black' was still obvious. One of the police



constables had himself had his face daubed with blacking, and several others had been assaulted and debagged. Windows had been broken, and innocent townsmen beaten up. What kind of soldiers

were these coarse brutes, and what about the officers who had actually led the assault on Dr Johnson? They ought to be drummed out of the regiment! Other newspaper editors called

LEFT: Dr Johnson's statue in Lichfield, a postcard stamped and posted in 1907; the blacking had clearly been cleaned off the lexicographer's face by this time.

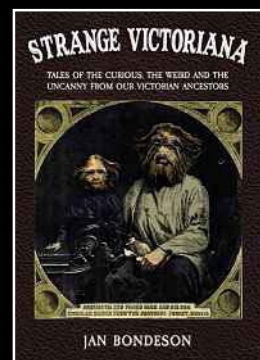
for the entire regiment to be disbanded, and claimed that the Marquess of Anglesey, who had taken command after the untimely death of his superior officer, had deliberately misled the journalists about the extent of the rioting.

But in the end, the officers and men of the Staffordshire Yeomanry appear to have got off more or less scot-free. This lenience did not have the desired effect: when the regiment met in Lichfield in June 1885, there were again fights with the police: windows were broken, and Dr Johnson's face daubed with blacking a second time! But just as the great man's face was eventually cleaned up by the locals, the equally black stain on the reputation of the Staffordshire Yeomanry was removed by the regiment's valiant wartime conduct. The Staffordshire Yeomanry did well in both World Wars, equipped with horses in the first and tanks in the second. The regiment was amalgamated with another yeomanry unit in 1992, and no longer exists. In contrast, Dr Johnson's statue still stands in Lichfield, proving that in the end, the pen is mightier than the sword.

STRANGE VICTORIANA

This is the 55th and final instalment of *Strange and Sensational Stories from the Illustrated Police News* after nearly six years, but you will find much more to read in Jan Bondeson's book *Strange Victoriana* (Amberley Publishing, Stroud 2016), which collects both the stories that have appeared in FT and an equal number of previously unpublished tales from "the worst newspaper in the world". Dog-Faced Men are exhibited on stage, doctors congregate around the bed of the Sleeping Frenchman of Soho, Miss Vint demonstrates her

Reincarnated Cats, and scantily dressed Female Somnambulists tumble from the roofs. From the spectral world, we have the Haunted Murder House near Chard, the Ghost of Berkeley Square, the Jumping Spectre of Peckham and the Fighting Ghost of Tondou. The White Gorilla takes a swig from its tankard of beer, eagles come swooping from the sky to carry off little children, heroic Newfoundland dogs plunge into the waves to rescue drowning mariners, and the Rat-Killing Monkey of Manchester goes on a rampage in the rat-pit, swinging a hammer...



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Why Fortean?



Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMix

ROGER BACON

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

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LANGUAGE...



HE WAS NOT WELL-KNOWN IN HIS OWN LIFETIME, BUT WITHIN A COUPLE OF CENTURIES HE BECAME A NATIONAL LEGEND!

PEOPLE CALLED HIM DOCTOR MIRABILIS...

... A KIND OF BENIGN FAUST, WHO CHEATED THE DEVIL AND WENT TO HEAVEN!



THEY SAID HE COULD SEE INTO THE FUTURE...



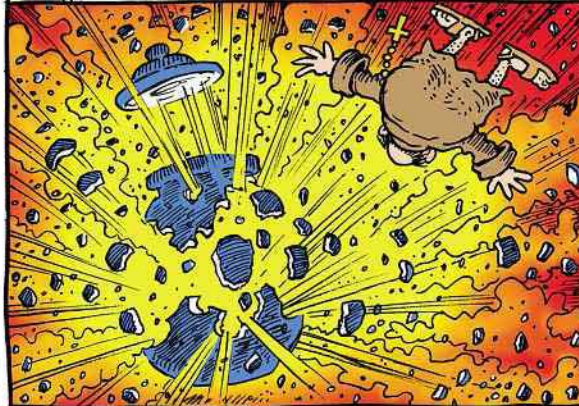
...AND THAT HE HAD DISCOVERED THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE!



SOME PEOPLE STILL THINK HE WAS THE CREATOR OF THE "MOST MYSTERIOUS BOOK IN THE WORLD": THE SO-CALLED VOYNICH MANUSCRIPT!



...AND HE IS OFTEN CREDITED WITH THE INVENTION OF GUNPOWDER IN THE WEST!



HE HAD A PLAN TO DEFEND BRITAIN BY BUILDING A GIANT BRASS WALL AROUND ITS COAST!



BUT THE MOST FAMOUS STORY ABOUT HIM WAS THAT HE BUILT A GIANT BRAZEN HEAD - WHICH COULD TALK!



THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMATIST ROBERT GREENE WROTE A HIT COMEDY ABOUT IT IN 1589...



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FORTEAN TIMES 352

ON SALE 30 MAR 2017

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



A desperate driver called 999 with his car stuck in cruise control at 110mph (177km/h), and minutes later died as he slammed into a lorry. Causal Gandhi, 32, began accelerating out of control on the M40 through Buckinghamshire in his white Skoda Octavia at around 3am on 2 February. His eight-minute emergency call ended as he hit the 18-ton flatbed truck parked in a lay-by near Junction 1 at Denham, reaching a speed of 119mph (192km/h) just before impact, which was so great he was decapitated. The truck driver, who was asleep in a bunk, was thrown forward but survived.

The faults described by Mr Gandhi, of Harrow, north-west London, meant that the Skoda must have suffered a simultaneous electronic and mechanical failure, but data analysis from the airbag systems failed to provide evidence of this. "There is no indication that there was any error or problem with any of the electronic systems in the five seconds leading up to the collision," said a vehicle data examiner for Skoda maker Volkswagen. However, the coroner at the inquest in Beaconsfield ruled out any suggestion that Mr Gandhi, the director of Rehncy Shaheen Chartered Accountants in Greenford, west London, had committed suicide. A work colleague and family friend had told police: "He was on top of the world and had everything to live for." *Metro*, *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 25 Nov 2016.

A 60-year-old British man died on 18 November while scuba diving on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia two days after two French tourists died within minutes of each other while snorkelling, prompting speculation that the fatalities were caused by Irukandji jellyfish, a transparent type of box jellyfish less than half an inch (13mm) in diameter found off northern Australia. Most victims are unaware of being stung and can go into cardiac arrest within half an hour.

The unnamed Briton had been diving off a boat during a holiday with his wife and was found on the seabed 49ft (15m) down, with his regulator out of his mouth. He could not be revived. The incident occurred at Agincourt Reef off Port Douglas, Queensland, about 100 miles (160km) north of Michaelmas Cay, where Jacques Goron, 76, and Danielle Franck, 74, died on 16 November. Both had medical conditions, but Dr Ross Walker, a cardiologist, said he thought they had been killed by Irukandji jellyfish. "It's highly unlikely two people are going to die within minutes of each other just because they're got underlying medical conditions," he said. Peter Fenner, an expert on jellyfish, agreed the French couple might have been stung. In 2002, British tourist Richard Jordan, 58, from Driffield, East Yorkshire, is believed to have been the first person to die from an Irukandji sting. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 19 Nov 2016.

A truck driver opened his trailer in Kent to find a dead stowaway crushed by Christmas catalogues, despite French authorities having searched the vehicle and given it the all-clear. The unidentified Afro-Caribbean man, possibly in his late 30s, was discovered with his legs protruding beneath the piles of overturned

catalogues at the Airport Service Station at Sellindge, near Ashford, on 18 October 2016. A post-mortem exam found the man's death was due to "traumatic compressive asphyxia". *D.Telegraph*, 6 Jan 2017.

A woman died after she fell into a tank of molten chocolate at the Russian confectionary factory where he worked. Svetlana Roslina, 24, dropped her mobile phone into the vat and fell in trying to retrieve it. "She was minced, only her legs were left," said a worker at the Sergiev-Posad plant in Fedortsovo, near Moscow. Another claimed she was dragged in while emptying a sack of ingredients into the mix. The victim and husband Vladimir had two children aged under five. *Metro*, 15 Dec 2016.

An eight-year-old boy died in Lynn, Arkansas, on 10 December while attending a birthday party at a church. He was playing in a cemetery behind the church when a large tombstone, dated 1906 and shaped like a tree stump, fell on him. He was taken to hospital where he was pronounced dead. *Region 8 News*, 11 Dec 2016.

A middle-aged dog walker was killed on 14 January at Thorpeness on the Suffolk coast when a 40ft (12m) cliff that had been weakened by recent storms fell on top of him. More than 60 people joined a rescue operation, all to no avail. *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 Jan 2017.

On 16 January, a utility worker in Key Largo, Florida, noticed that a section of a paved street was not settling properly. He removed a manhole cover and descended into the 15ft (4.6m)-deep drainage hole to investigate. When he fell silent, a fellow utility worker sensed he was trapped and climbed down to rescue him. When he too stopped responding, a third worker climbed down. All three men died, overcome by poisonous fumes. They were identified as Elway Gray, 34, Louis O'Keefe, 49, and Robert Wilson, 24. They were responding to neighbours' complaints of sewage backup in the area. Firefighter Leonardo Moreno, who attempted to save them, also became unconscious within seconds and was flown to hospital where he was in critical condition the next day. The hole, just wide enough to fit a body, was filled with hydrogen sulphide and methane created from years of rotting vegetation. None of the four men wore masks or carried air tanks. Moreno descended without his air tank because he couldn't fit through the hole with it; luckily, a colleague was able to wear his gear and pull Moreno out. *Washington Post*, 18 Jan 2017.

A traffic warden issued a parking ticket for a lorry illegally parked outside Farm Foods in Bolton, Greater Manchester, failing to notice that Nicholas Allcock, 52, lay dead at the wheel. Contractor NSL issued the ticket in March 2016 on behalf of Bolton Council. FT has often noted parking tickets being issued to vehicles containing dead drivers [e.g. **FT48:23**, **59:13**, **71:14**, **176:28**], but this is the first we've heard about for some time. *Sun*, 3 Aug 2016.

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